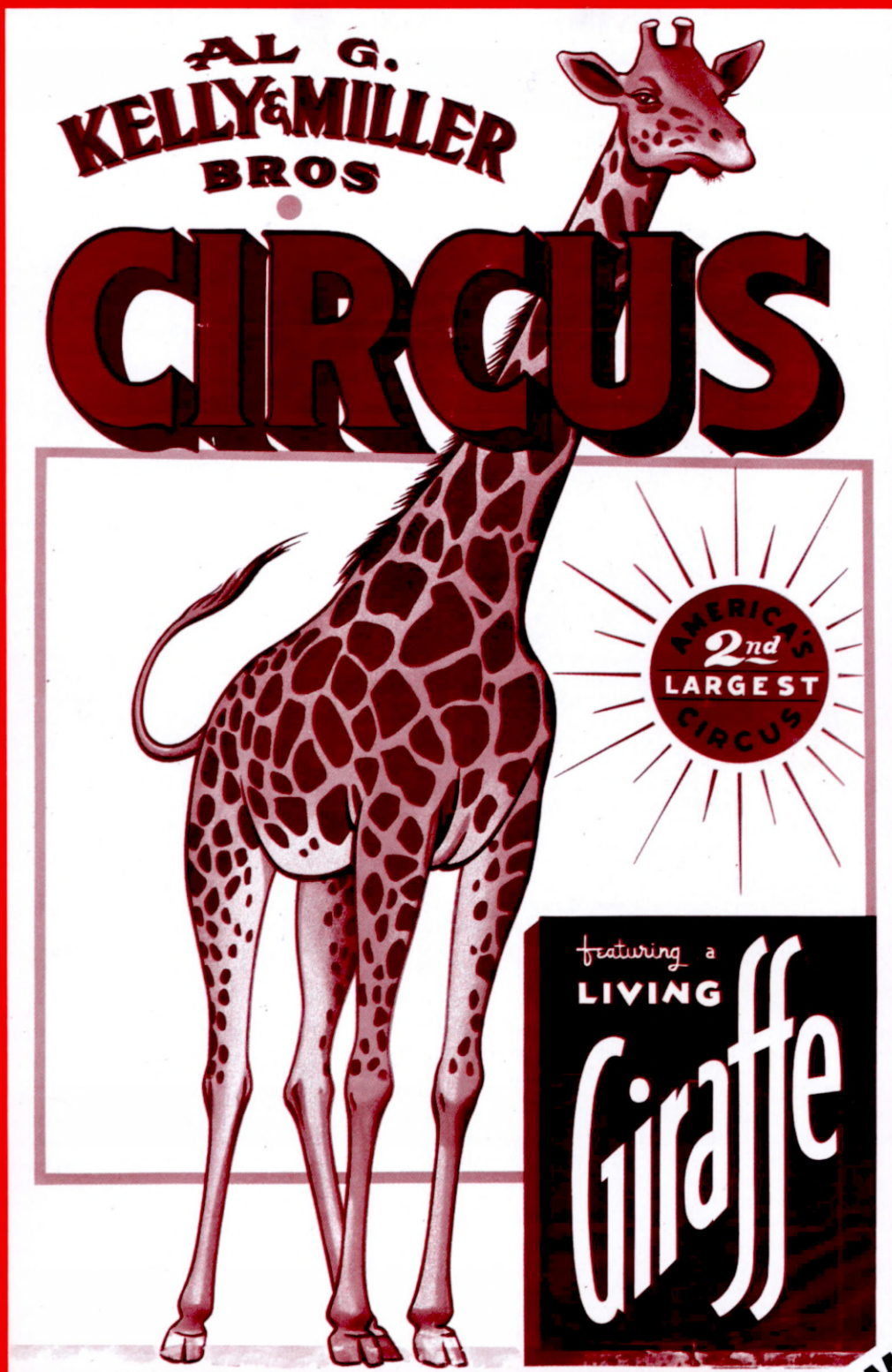


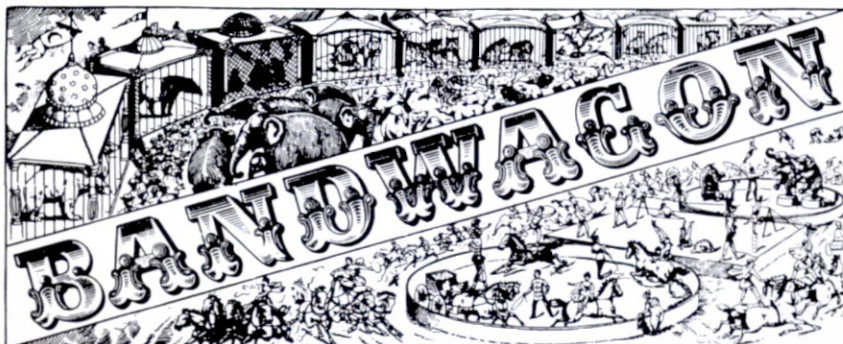
BANDWAGON

JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1984

Kelly-Miller Returns



THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Vol. 28, No. 1 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1984

Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Editor

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor and Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

On April 14, 1984 a very famous circus title will return when the Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros. Circus hits the road after a long absence. Starting in 1938, the show, owned by Obert, Kelly and D.R. Miller, grew into the largest and finest high grass truck circus ever to tour the United States. In 1970, D.R. Miller, dean of American circus owners, changed the name of the show to Carson and Barnes, and the Kelly-Miller title has been dormant since that time.

During the 1983 season Miller purchased the Big John Strong Circus, and following the closing stand shipped the equipment to Hugo, Oklahoma, winter quarters of Carson and Barnes. This equipment will be enlarged, and will tour using the Kelly-Miller title. David E. Rawls will manage the show which will travel on around ten trucks and carry two elephants.

The poster on the cover was used by

Kelly-Miller in 1948. Designed and lithographed by the Globe Poster Company, of Chicago, this one sheet poster is an actual lithograph and not printed by letterpress. Pfening Archives.

NEW MEMBERS

- | | |
|---|-------|
| Richard E. Thompson
36 Lake Ave.
Auburn, New York 13021 | #2821 |
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17040 Kimbark Ave.
South Holland, Ill. 60473 | #2822 |
| Mike Hoffman
c/o Bun's Restaurant
10 Winter St.
Delaware, Ohio 43015 | #2823 |
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1414 Winding Lane
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Des Moines, Iowa 50311

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139 Ryon Ave.
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Charles S. Proctor #2827
1129 N. Beckley Ave.
Dallas, Texas 75203

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Columbus, Ohio 43214

Thomas J. Smrt #2830
9716 South Grant Highway
Marengo, Ill. 60152

Carl Wissman #2831
R.R. 2
Quincy, Ill. 62301

REINSTATED

Paul A. Ruddell #65
P.O. Box O
Rehoboth, Del. 19971

1984 CHS Convention

The Gollmar-Moeller-Ringling CFA Tent will hold its annual banquet on May 19 during the CHS convention in Baraboo. Their meeting has created an extraordinary amount of interest because of the fame of their banquet speakers. CHS members wishing to attend the Gollmar-Moeller-Ringling dinner must purchase tickets directly from the tent as no tickets are available through the CHS. Elsewhere in this issue is an advertisement for their event, and CHS members are strongly encouraged to buy their tickets immediately. The tent expects the limited number of tickets to sell out very quickly, and CHS members who hesitate in purchasing them will be unable to attend. You will not want to miss this, so please send your check to the Gollmar-Moeller-Ringling Tent right away.

In other convention news, a number of members have volunteered to present papers. They will cover many aspects of circus history, and convention attendees will find them interesting and informative. Bob Parkinson of the Circus World Museum will exhibit some of the museum's treasures, including rarities from their superb film archives. The second annual CHS auction will be held May 18. This event was a huge success last year, and the convention committee anticipates it to be even better this time. Last year many very desirable pieces of circiana went on the block, included posters from the 1930s, 19th century newspaper ads, a beautiful Barnum and Bailey one sheet, and a P.T. Barnum autograph.

Make your motel and Gollmar-Moeller-Ringling reservations now. Advance registration forms for the convention will be sent out March 1. Anyone wishing to receive a registration form should contact Richard W. Flint, CHS Convention, 3751 Beech Ave., Baltimore, Maryland 21211. Come and help us celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first performance of the Ringling Bros. Circus.

BARABOO MOTELS

Blue & White 356-6740
Campus 356-8366
Dell-Aire 356-6050
Devi-Bara 356-5571
Dream Lodge 356-5474
Highlander 356-4410
Hillside 356-6011
Log Lodge 356-6552
Spinning Wheel 356-3933
Thunderbird 356-7757
Vacationer 356-3151
Willow Run 356-2525
All are area code 608.

DO NOT SEND DUES EARLY

CHS Secretary Edward Jones requests that members and subscribers do not send their payment until their dues notice is received. Advance payment causes problems in properly recording the payment. Please send your payment in the self addressed return envelope you will receive in April.

1984 CHS Election Results

President	
Richard W. Flint	158
Albert Conover	1
Fred Dahlinger	1
Verne Fussell	1
Fred D. Pfening IV	1
Gordon Potter	1
Vice President	
Fred D. Pfening III	160
Fred Dahlinger	1
Roland J. Gibbs	1
Otto Scheiman	1
Secretary-Treasurer	
Edward L. Jones	160
Harold R. Green	1
Directors	
Div. 1 Fred D. Pfening Jr.	34
Div. 2 Copeland MacAllister	17
Div. 3 Bill Rhodes	3
Porter R. Hemphill	2
Chris Audibert	1
David Baruch	1
Gordon Carver	1
Morris B. Crowder	1
Judy Daykin	1
Dan Draper	1
Bill Elbirn	1
James Harshman	1
Gaylord Hartman	1
Walter G. Heist	1
Fred Heatley	1
Robert Huston	1
Eugene Mascoli	1
Dominic Yodice	1

Div. 4 Joseph T. Bradbury	20
James Dunwoody	2
Div. 5 Robert L. Parkinson	26
Peter M. Hildreth	1
Div. 6 James McRoberts	11
Div. 7 Joseph S. Rettinger	7
Div. 8 Chang Reynolds	16
Fred Kingdom	1
Div. 9 Edward W. Cripps	1
Total Ballots cast	173

ROLLER BROS. CIRCUS

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Souvenir Route Journal

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Tom "Bumbles" Tomashek

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circus personnel, notes, com-
mentary and souvenir tickets*

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on May 19, 1884

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personalities of today
and yesteryear

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Centennial Association

\$15.00 per person

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P. O. Box 326
Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913

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lopes with price wanted.

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Box 14844, Columbus, OH 43214

CIRCUS MEMORABILIA FOR SALE

Many items
which were included on my
previous list
are still available

PLUS

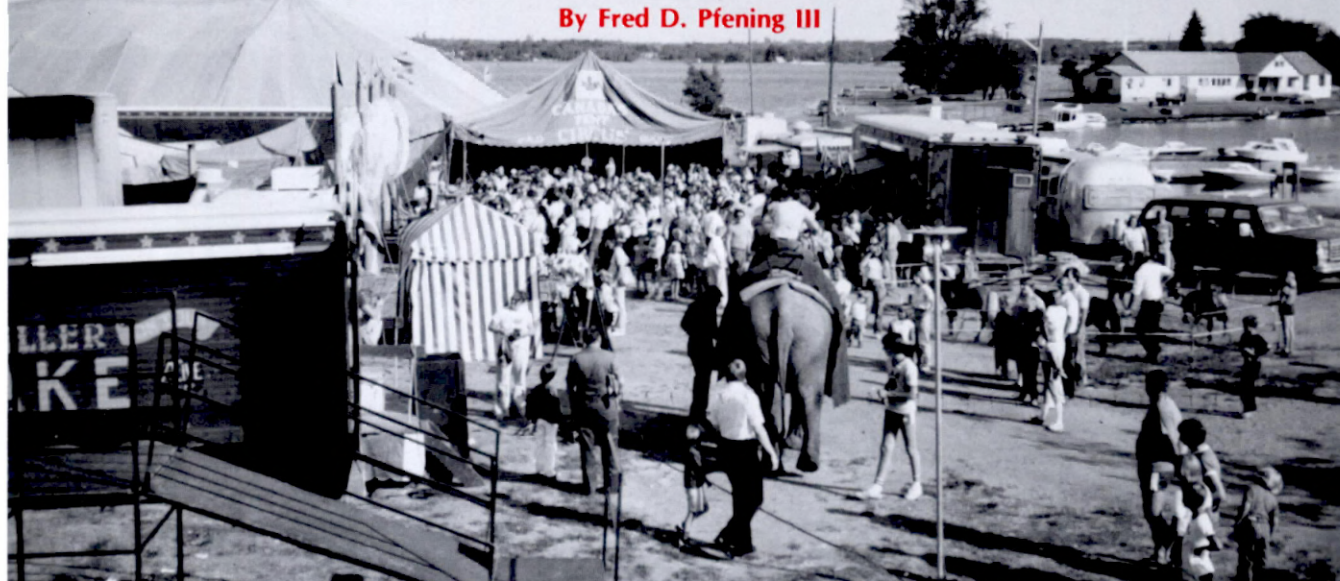
MANY ITEMS
Not previously listed
For latest list send
50¢ and 4 x 9" stamped and
Addressed Envelope TO:

ROY F. ZINSER
47 Minnehaha Circle
Maitland, Fla. 32751

The Circus Year in Review

1983 Season

By Fred D. Pfening III



It was a pretty good year for the circus industry, particularly for the segment that did business under a tent. The bigger operas generally had fine seasons, and many of the smaller shows also came home winners. A number of new entries took the field, the first increase in the number of touring tenters in years. They had mixed results. Only two outfits closed early, although two or three others barely limped back to quarters. All will try again in the coming year, and at this writing only the John Strong title appears to have made its swan song in 1983.

Showmen felt the salutary effects of the country's improved economy, and many noted that concession sales were way up over the previous year. While many troupes tried new marketing and promotional methods, the old saw about the necessity of a strong advance again proved true. A lack of a top flight front end was the cause of many small and new circus' difficulties. Other problems which vexed circus owners included the summer's heat which kept patrons off the lot, and the ever increasing regulations issued by all levels of government. Tightened laws regarding animals and motor vehicles were particularly troublesome.

The indoor and fair circuses again employed more people than their tented brethren. These organizations also experienced bigger grosses during the year. A considerable reshuffling of Shrine dates occurred, and a number

of dates which traditionally had been in auditoriums were played under canvas for the first time. Circus arts troupes, some very small, continued to gain in popularity, and provided a new wrinkle to American circus.

Among the large aggregations, Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. had a banner year. Many changes were initiated by the management team of John Pugh and Doug Holwadel who completed their second season of ownership in 1983. In an October *Amusement Business* interview, Pugh stated that business was up 40%, that the daily nut was down \$2500, that concession sales were way up, and that the show had more buy-outs than in 1982. Under this arrangement the show sold the date to the sponsor for a flat \$15,000, but kept all concession revenue. In all, Pugh said, it was the best year he had experienced in his twenty-two with Beatty-Cole.

As a result of a customer survey taken in 1982, the show changed its marketing strategy, putting more emphasis on media ads and retail promotions, phone promotions and hanging more paper. The show also gave a \$2 discount to senior citizens in the hope they would take their grandchildren to the circus.

More attention was paid to routing than in past years. In spite of playing more one day stands, the show cut the number of miles traveled to 10,000 from as many as 25,000 in the past. Needless to say, this had a positive effect on the daily expense.

Martin and Downs on a tight lot near a Canadian lake. Note snake show on left, pony sweep on right, and elephant ride in center foreground. The side show talker is about to turn a tip. Al Stencell photo.

The sprucing up of the equipment, which began in 1982, continued as two new diesel tractors, and four new trailers were added. The show traveled behind a total of thirty-one trucks, eleven of which were diesels, with plans to eventually convert to all diesel engines. When completed this will considerably cut down on the number of spare parts the show needs to carry.

Beatty-Cole opened in late March in Fort Lauderdale, and worked its way up the Atlantic coast to its traditional Eastern territory. Business was excellent at the usually unpredictable stands in the Carolinas. The show played two days on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City near the Resorts International Hotel. At this date the elephants raced on the beach as a publicity stunt, and one of them later injured a townier who claimed the bull tossed him in the air when he attempted to pet it. Others alleged the man was drunk and had tried to blow down the elephant's trunk. Veteran bull man Fred Logan was off the show for a while for an ulcer operation in May.

The show dropped some Massachusetts dates in early July, but picked up others. In August it shook up the marketing department and made some changes in personnel. A bomb threat at Commack, New York fortunately



proved false. The Great Vashek, aerial motorcyclist, wasn't so lucky as he was seriously injured in a fall. It ended his season, but he planned to return to the game in 1984. John Pugh, described in one account as the Lee Iacocca of the circus business, became an American citizen in October.

A highlight of the season was a three day stand in Nashville in September, sponsored by the Humane Association. The date included a black tie, \$100 a seat performance. At Nashville the show erected its new big top, purchased from Sarasota's Leaf Tent Company for \$103,000. The new tent was 150' by 300', seated 3500 comfortably, 4000 if strawed, and was the only canvas big show top used by a major American circus. It was packed up after the date, and will open with the show next year. The old canvas was finished the year.

The performance was similar to past years and again featured Capt. Dave Hoover with seven tigers, five lions and a lioness, and Fred Logan and nine elephants. A dog act, and trained baboons were new on the show. A fine seven piece band backed up the acts.

The Circus Vargas had by far the longest tour of the three big tenters. It opened in California in mid-January, and exhibited in the state until May. After a 700 mile jump from Oakland to Washington state, the show headed east, and played a two month engagement in and around Chicago, mostly in suburban shopping malls. The troupe left the Midwest in a hurry, making a huge jump from Quincy, Illinois to Shreveport, Louisiana in late summer. It headed back home soon after hitting the South, and closed at Modesto, California on November 23. The show played more two day stands than in the past.

A big city outfit which made good advantage of the mass media, Vargas played extended engagements in the Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago metropolitan areas. It made a series of short jumps playing shopping malls, relying heavily on television advertising, and a combination merchant ticket-route card. The L. A. grosses were up from 1982 with concessions ahead by 30% in spite of horrid weather. The Chicago business

The Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. put up this new Leaf tent in Nashville, Tennessee in September. Afterwards it was sent back home, not to be unfurled until next season. David Price photo.

was bad because of the summer's high temperatures, and a stand at the Chicago Amphitheater parking lot was a financial blood bath. Some of the higher paid acts missed paydays as a result, but their salaries were later made up. Despite the bad experience, 80% of the Chicago dates reportedly

Ringling ran this controversial ad against Vargas in the June 19 *Chicago Sun Times*. Sources close to the Vargas management felt the ad helped give them credibility.

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10:30 PM	\$1.00 - \$15.00	10:30 PM	\$1.00 - \$15.00
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Like old man river, D.R. Miller's Carson and Barnes Circus just kept rolling along in 1983. As usual the show had a menagerie which would make Noah jealous. It featured a rhino, hippo, baby giraffe, camels, much lead stock, and twenty-nine elephants including four Africans, three of which were babies who joined the show shortly after the opening. The two hour performance included Pat White's cat act, five rings of liberty horses, and of course, a huge elephant display. The spec, entitled "The Golden Age of Chivalry" was well costumed, and the giraffe participated in the walkaround. Charles Stevenson's windjammers played a fine selection of circus music.

The season began at Paris, Texas in mid-March for the local Shrine. In April the show headed west, and reached California on April 29 where it stayed through mid-June. It was the first time since 1960 that a Miller-owned circus had traveled to the golden state. After a few weeks in Oregon and Washington, the show headed east through the mountain states back into its customary territory in the Midwest. On October 1, it entered Missouri, and then toured Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas until its closing on November 17.

It was a highly successful season with one observer going so far as to state that it was the best in the forty-seven years Dory Miller had taken a show out of the barn. The California

The interior of Franzen Bros. tent looked good. Here owner Wayne Franzen puts a llama and a camel through their routine. Note ring curb illuminated with chaser lights. Tom Parkinson photo.



Weather was a major factor in the circus business in 1983 as spring rains in California, and the summer's heat made life difficult. Here some of the Carson and Barnes elephants pull a semi and trailer out of the Beaumont, California mud. Jerry Cash photo

dates produced mixed results, but the show rammed, crammed, and jammed 'em in the Midwest. Racine, Wisconsin reportedly gave Miller the best single day of his career.

Carson and Barnes traveled behind forty-three steering wheels owned by the Miller Equipment Company of Hugo, Oklahoma. They were mostly diesel tractors, and the show carried its own fuel truck. The front door had a new marquee, and the midway had a pony sweep, kiddie rides, a snake show, and a Radioactive Russian Rat show for which Bobby Gibbs did the talking.

Pat White was written up in the *National Enquirer*. Bobby Gibbs left the show in the fall, going over to Ford Bros. Dory Miller worked one of the liberty horse acts on special occasions including dates in Baraboo, and at the CHS convention in Tallmadge, Ohio. At Tucson on April 25, the show took delivery on a new plastic Italian big top. The tent was a push-pole type, measuring approximately 356' by 124'. At Richmond, Indiana Bill Farmer drove a six hitch of Percherons in the spec.

In September, the Miller organization bought the John Strong Circus which will tour the Midwest in 1984 as the Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros. Circus. The idea of using a historic parade wagon on Carson and Barnes ap-

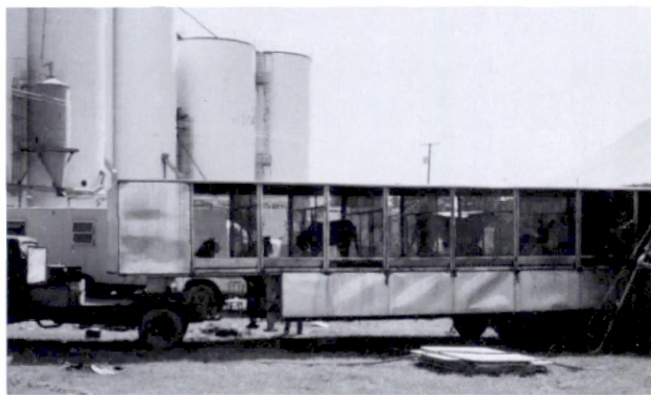
pears out, although there are some rumblings about a parade. A six horse hitch and another tour of California are definitely in the cards.

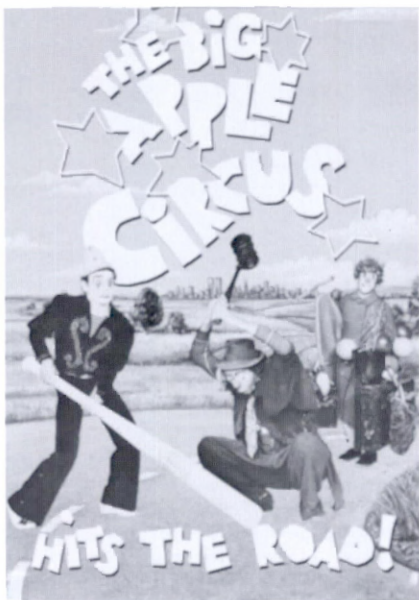
The Big Apple Circus, the PBS of the arenic world, began its summer tour in Brooklyn on May 12, and ended it at Bridgeport, Connecticut on July 31, playing nine cities in between. At Bridgeport the Friends of the Barnum Museum sponsored the show, a gesture which the museum's founder no doubt would have endorsed. The annual Lincoln Center date ran from November 25 until the second day of the new year.

The one ring show was the result of Paul Binder's artistic vision and Alan Slifka's financial acumen. Its advertising called itself "the only circus good enough to play Lincoln Center," and indeed the show stressed quality above quantity. The tenting season featured Heidi Herriott on trapeze, Barbara and Dalilah Woodcock and their elephant Toto, the Japanese top spinner Koma Zuru, and the legendary juggler Francis Brunn. All this talent performed under the same plastic Italian big top used in 1982. The Christmas date at Lincoln Center included all the summer stars with the exception of Zuru. They were augmented by Katja Schumann, high school riding; Buckles Woodcock, and two more elephants; the Gaonas, flying trapeze; and Nathalie Enterline, a world champion baton twirler. In all, they comprised a remarkably powerful performance under the heated tent.

The tenth year of Wayne Franzen's Franzen Bros. Circus was a winner. Starting in Florida in March, the show toured the Midwest and the plains states in the summer, and played Texas and Oklahoma in the fall before heading east to close back in Florida in mid-November. After experiencing rain thirty-five out of the first forty-five days on the road, the show did

The government liked this new trailer for the cats on Franzen Bros. It provided adequate space and ventilation for them, and was high enough from the ground to not allow children to get their hands near the lions. Tom Parkinson photo.





The Big Apple Circus used clever hand outs to promote their eleven city summer tour. Another flyer said "Give us your tired, your thrill hungry, your laugh starved masses . . ." Fred D. Pfening III collection.

well. It had its best day ever at Plymouth, Indiana around Labor Day, and garnered much national press in May when a Mason City, Illinois doctor bought out the show and admitted all his townsmen free. Henry Maxfield, the physician and a CFA member, wanted to "thank everybody for their loyalty, faith, and trust" during his years of practice.

Franzen used eight trucks, including a new semi for the cats which received favorable comments from government inspectors. It had more than adequate space for the felines, and the compartments were elevated enough so children could not put their arms in the cages. The midway had a pony ride and an elephant ride. By current standards the show did a lot of billing including a large amount of window work.

The performance ran ninety minutes, and was backed up by an organ, drum, and trumpet. Wayne Franzen worked the show's one elephant, the cat act, twelve liberty horses, and a camel and llama act—making him undoubtedly the Gunther Gebel-Williams of the sticks. His sons worked a goat act. The show was a one ringer with a permanent arena for the lions and tigers. The tent interior was very attractive, and the ring curb used chaser lights which followed the animals around the ring. The candy butchers wore red and white vests, bow ties, and even white shirts, and the woman handling concessions dressed in a long gown. Both made a good impression, and helped the show maintain its

good reputation with the public and its sponsors.

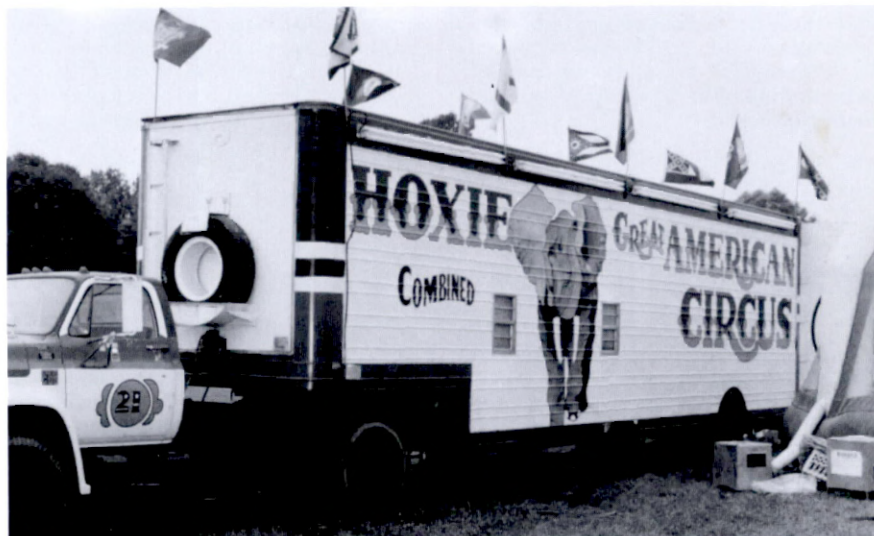
Playing the South, East, and Midwest, Hoxie's Great American Circus had a good year. Increased phone promotion was given as the reason. Leonard B. "Hoxie" Tucker toured only one show, using the best equipment from his two 1982 entries, with most of it, including the tent, coming from the Great American Circus. During the season, Tucker sold the show to manager Allan Hill, thus ending Hoxie's long association with the outdoor show world. Sale included four year rights to title.

The show was carried in thirteen vehicles, including eight semis. The midway had a moon bounce, pony ride, elephant ride, a sideshow, and the ubiquitous concession stand. The performance was in three rings, only one of which had a curb. Exhibition included two of the Herriott girls, who had a number of fine acts; the Loyal riding family whose act was topped by a backward somersault from one horse to another, a rarity in modern circus-ing; and four elephants. The four piece band played traditional circus tunes.

One of the elephants, Janet, stomped Tucker badly at Geneva, New York on June 5. He suffered a broken pelvis, and multiple back bruises, but he recovered enough to make the July CFA convention in Philadelphia.

Roberts Bros. opened in Florida, and played the South. It then headed as far west as Ohio, after which it went east for a series of dates in New England, and Pennsylvania. It closed in North Carolina in late September, but reopened in Florida in November. Some early stands were for the Police Benevolent Association in Florida, and later in the season, it played some Southern fairs.

Hoxie's Great American Circus used this flashy semi trailer as a ticket and office wagon. Arnold Brito photo.



Robert and Doris Earl headed the organization, Bobby and Teresa Earl ran the concessions, and Jeff Earl was the boss canvasman. This family show toured on seven trucks, and used a 60' by 160' big top with nine high bleachers seating 1500. The front yard had a moon walk, pony ride, basketball pitch, dart game, elephant-skinned dog pit show, and a concession wagon. An organ and drums provided music to the three ring performance.

It was a rough year for the new Lewis Bros. Circus, owned by former Hoxie manager John Lewis. It opened in Georgia in early April, and followed with dates in Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, Maryland, New Jersey and New York. Business was good during the early part of the season, but July and August were cruel and it closed around Labor Day. Early closing was attributed to a lack of a strong front end which resulted in a number of open days.

The six show-owned trucks were beautifully decorated with pictorials by Lewis himself. The midway included a snake show, pony sweep, concession trailer, and a side show with an attractive banner line, also painted by Lewis. The side show top was a dramatic type 40' by 60' square end. The big top was a well worn 86' round with two 40s' which had seen duty on King Bros., and the seats were newly built nine high bleachers throughout.

The performance took place inside one standard ring, one mat ring with no curbs, and a steel arena which remained up during the entire show. The four piece band played familiar circus music. Two of Hoxie's elephants started out with Lewis Bros., but left the show soon after the opening. Persistent reports that the show later added an elephant and a hippo were unverified.

Roller Bros. Circus, another new show, also had a tough year. Owned by former carnie Jim Roller, it opened in



A good matinee on Hoxie's Great American Circus in Illinois. A butcher hawks cotton candy at the intermission as the children line up for their turn on the elephant. Tom Parkinson photo.

San Antonio on April 2 as the El Latino Circus, but used the Roller title afterwards. Later in the year sour business in the Dakotas led the outfit to jump into new territory in the Midwest where the grosses picked up. After some struggling the show made the season, and returned to its Lake Hamilton, Arkansas winter quarters in November after exhibiting in fifteen states.

This one gave a fine appearance on the lot with its new tent from Bruno, an 80' round with a 30' and two 20' middles. The performance took place in one standard ring, a mat ring, and a permanent steel arena. An electric organ provided music during the performance which was above the average for a small circus. The midway had a snake show, a moon walk, and an elephant ride. The show's single bull was from D.R. Miller.

Roller moved on about ten show owned trucks including a spool truck with a stake driver built on the side,

Longtime Hoxie manager Joe Lewis had his own show out in 1983. Lewis himself did the design on this attractive painting on one of the show's semi trailers. Fred Heatley photo.



Virtually every tented show had a snake show on their midway in 1983. This one on Lewis Bros. followed the legendary side show banner artist Snap Wyatt's dictum that "alive" is the single most important word to use on a banner. Fred Heatley photo.

business. On July 29, the elephant Myrtle died. An old trouper, she was part of Ben Davenport's big herd in the 1940s. On September 13, at Caryville, Tennessee, the show also died after a long struggle. Mel Silverlake may have hurraed it through a few dates afterwards as Col. Mel's Old West Circus, but this was unconfirmed. Likewise, little data was available on dates for Col. Mel in March and November in Texas.

John "Gopher" Davenport's Ford Bros. Circus from Cut and Shoot, Texas played a high grass route which was interrupted in August by a tour of Alaska. The number of steering wheels on the show apparently varied during the year. A published report stated it had at fourteen on opening day, but an eyewitness counted six on the lot in May. At the latter stand, none of the equipment was lettered with the exception of an animal truck which carried the name of a moving

Roller Bros. used a fine new Bruno tent. The moon bounce on left was a staple on show midways in 1983. Ralph Hartman photo.





Roller Bros. did its part to increase American productivity with this combination spool truck and stake driver, a fine labor saving device for a small circus. Tom Parkinson photo.

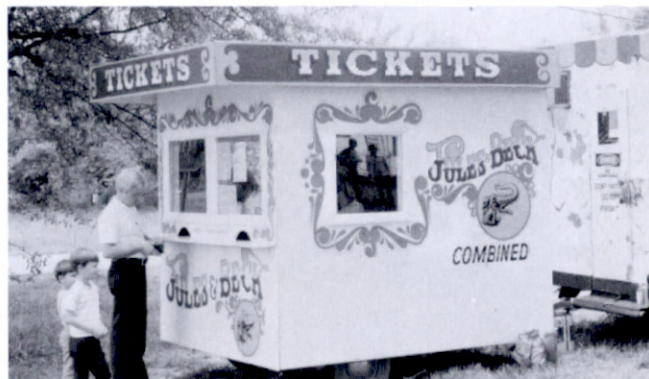
company. The midway included a pony ride, an elephant ride, a snake show and concessions. A new Leaf tent housed the performance; it was dark blue, and 120' by 200'.

Davenport patterned his show after D.R. Miller's operations, and consequently was strong in the animal department. The troupe carried eight elephants, two of which were Africans; three llamas; a camel; and a giraffe. The bulls raced down the streets of many small towns as a promotion. The show presented sixteen acts in three rings while the audience sat on a folding seat truck formerly on Vargas. An organist accompanied the acts.

Ford Bros. used lots of posters, newspaper ads, and a four page courier, but like many other smaller circuses had no printed program. While no overall report of the year's business was received, indications were that a series of dates in the Jacksonville area in December were not good.

Because of the economic situation in its home country, the Suarez-Gaona National Mexican Circus tried America in 1983—and probably wished they had stayed south of the border. Owned

Ford Bros. on the lot in Oberlin, Kansas, May 20. The seat semi is parked in front of the new Leaf big top. Joe Fleming photo.



In a classic circus scene a father buys tickets for his sons to the Jules and Beck Circus opening performance in Grayson, Georgia on May 21. Joe Bradbury photo.

circus to D.R. Miller and associates, and by the time the circus closed for the last time at Snowflake, Arizona on October 25 not a single member of the Strong family was around the show. Strong planned to continue with his indoor Clown Capades and magic shows, which had successful seasons. He stated that profits from them had been used to keep the tented show out for a number of years.

Al and Shirley Stencell had their Super Circus International indoors in Ontario, Quebec, and the eastern provinces for eight weeks. A three ringer, it moved on rented trucks and did excellent business. Starting in May their Martin and Downs Circus began its seventh season, touring Canada for sixteen weeks. For a while both units were out at once; Al managed the indoor show while Shirley was in charge of the outdoor troupe. The big top was an 80' with two 30's, and the hour and a half performance took place in one ring and a stage. The midway included a pony sweep, snake show, jewelry stand, air pillow, elephant ride, and concessions. This one used advertising banners inside the tent.

Oscar Bros. Circus had a blow down at its Port Richey, Florida open-

The Suarez-Gaona Circus from Mexico was the only show without a midway. Note European big top in background. John Van Matre photo.





ing in February. The wind also tipped over several cat cages, but there were no injuries to man or beast. The Manuel Romas owned show was carried on six trucks, and used a 130' by 260' tent which held 3600. The circus had one elephant, and played in Mississippi, Georgia, and Florida until at least October.

Dave and Judy Twomey's Happy-time Dog and Pony Show traveled between 6000 and 7000 miles during the year, almost all of it in California where they mainly played fairs. Two dates were notable. At the L.A. County fair at Pomona a 100' by 140' rented tent was used, and the show was beefed up with Howard Johnson's elephant, and other animal acts for the eighteen day run. The other special date was a return engagement at the Glen Eden nudist camp in Riverside County, California. The showfolk worked the Glen Eden date in their standard attire.

Happytime traveled on two trucks and two trailers, and performed in a 50' by 80' tent. The one ring show was either booked direct or through agents. In an *Amusement Business* interview Twomey noted they had a fine year in bookings, but their grosses suffered as they had not raised their price for three years, and promised that clients would pay more in 1984.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, owned by Irvin Feld and Kenneth Feld and the grandest of all American circuses, again fielded two shows. The Red unit opened on December 30, 1982

Manuel Romas' Oscanian Bros. Circus had a good looking big top, and a bus converted into a ticket and office wagon. Jim Parker photo.

The John Strong Circus in its last days. Photo taken in Prescott, Arizona on October 19; less than a week later the show closed for the final time. Marv Krieger photo.

at the arena near the Venice winter quarters. Soon after, CBS taped its traditional broadcast of the show at St. Petersburg with Sugar Ray Leonard and his son as hosts. Reports indicated that business was off at the long engagement at Madison Square Garden which ran from March 29 to June 5. A sign of the changing times was a gay night at the circus in San Francisco. Another Bay area performance was used as a fund raising vehicle for the mayor's re-election. In November the Red unit played the venerable Chicago Stadium for the first time. Previously the arena had been controlled by the late Arthur Wirtz, a rival showman, and multi-millionaire sportsman and real estate magnate.

In June Ringling-Barnum took out wait ads in the Chicago papers against Vargas which was then making its big swing through area shopping centers. The ads were remarkable in that they were placed four months before the Big One's arrival, and for their content which demonstrated that opposition bill writing was not an entirely lost art. Purple prose aside, neither show was a victor in Chicago as both experienced light business, and offered heavy ticket discounting.

Managed by Bob McDougall, the Red unit again had the stronger performance of the two Ringling-Barnum entries. Gunther Gebel-Williams, by far the most dynamic performer in this country, worked nineteen tigers,

a liberty act, and an elephant act to headline the show. New in 1983 was Satin, billed as circusdom's first black aerial act. The turn consisted of two former showgirls who put together the act with the help of the Flying Farfans. Missing from 1983 was the aerial spec, the leopard act, and Gebel-Williams' giraffe.

A new addition was the promotional use of the Pink Panther. The popular cartoon character starred in the pre-intermission spec, and was featured in virtually all advertising, even appearing on the program cover.

The show moved on forty-one railroad cars. Included were nine flats, two tunnel cars, one by-level car, four stocks, two concession cars, one storage car, and twenty-two coaches. A new water truck was lettered and painted in the style of the tent show days.

The Blue show opened in Venice in late January. When it played Asheville, North Carolina in early March it was only eighty-five miles from its sister unit, then in Raleigh. Henry Ringling North visited the circus in Cincinnati. Also in Cincinnati, Proctor and Gamble bought out three performances for employees to pitch its profit sharing plan. Near season's end Toledo became a last minute substitute for Pittsburgh as a rhubarb with the arena wasn't resolved.

Managed by Mike Fauls, the show traveled on forty-three railroad cars. No breakdown of the train was available. The performance included Elvin

Oscanian Bros. Circus used this colorfully painted semi and trailer. Red and white striped tent in background. Jim Parker photo.





Red unit manager Bob McDougall had this water truck lettered in the style of an earlier era, and painted "Ringling red." Bob McDougall photo.

Bale, Axel Gautier with twenty-three elephants, and the Flying Vasquezes. Miguel Vasquez, the top flyer in the business, accomplished the quadruple somersault about forty times by mid-September; he averaged about one completion per town over the year. Late in the season Elvin Bale blew the show for an Italian circus, and was replaced by George Coronas. When they closed it up in Cleveland on November 20 long time cat trainer Charly Baumann retired from the ring. He will continue as performance director.

While many acts, particularly Gautier's, received acclaim, many observers felt that the performance in general didn't match that of previous years. Nevertheless, it probably was the second best show in the country, behind the Red unit, and if not the "greatest and the grandest" was very close.

During the year Axel Gautier was featured in *People* magazine, and Miguel Vasquez in *Reader's Digest*. Vasquez's marriage was announced in *Time*, which also ran a short piece on Satin. All of which must have made the press department very happy.

Big news on the labor relations front was the March 25 decertification of the performers from the American Guild of Variety Artists which had represented them since 1955. Kinkers voted during engagements in Cincinnati and Baltimore, after which the ballots were co-mingled, and opened in New York on March 31. After challenged votes were disallowed, the final tally was 192 to dump the union, and only 19 to retain it.

The decertification election was initiated by the performers, and was supervised by the National Labor Relations Board, exactly as it would have been done in a more mundane enterprise such as a foundry or a bakery equipment company. Both the circus management and the union, however, exercised their legal right to provide information and voice their opinion.

The Felds passed out a series of letters and posters which encouraged the performers to vote out the union. One poster featured an AGVA official sitting next to a comely woman at the circus with the catch-line above stating "Don't spend your paycheck to buy AGVA front row seats." Another, showing a union official inside a RBBB paycheck, told the performers "You don't need an AGVA dues partner in your paycheck." The union countered with ads in the trade publications stating their case. One was an open letter from Edward Asner supporting AGVA.

AGVA probably deserved its fate. Its membership had been declining for years, and in an attempt to increase its treasury had raised dues, tripling them for some performers. It had a reputation as a "do nothing" organization, and further hurt itself by claiming a show employee had filed a grievance which the employee quickly denied in an open letter.

Before the result was known, performers commented that the election had a positive effect as the Felds made

The Ringling-Barnum Blue unit pulled into Atlanta in early February. Note hold-down chains extending from end of wagons to flats. Richard J. Reynolds III photo.



The Blue unit posted this fine twenty-four sheet billboard for their Atlanta date. Richard J. Reynolds III photo.

themselves more available to them, and many beefs were cleared up. The election decimated AGVA membership, and left the circus business completely non-union. An interesting historical note, AGVA traced its roots to the American Federation of Actors which organized the show in 1937, and subsequently led a strike the next year which sent it back to Sarasota.

In another corporate note, a new legal entity was used in 1983. Checks and contracts read "I & K Productions, Inc. dba Ringling Bros.-Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows." It presumably was the result of Irvin Feld's and Kenneth Feld's financing arrangement with the Wells Fargo Bank.

The Royal Hanneford Circus, owned by Tommy Hanneford, opened its Shrine tour in Saginaw in mid-January, and continued in Michigan and Ohio through late April, sometimes breaking into two units. In May it played a big date in Houston for the first time. At Dayton, one of the elephants stumbled during the spec causing Barbara Woodcock to fall and break both wrists. A clown tried to catch her as she fell. He missed, and the elephant fell on him. Miraculous-

ly, he escaped with only minor injuries.

Hanneford helped Detroit celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary Shrine circus in March. The Moslem Temple there established a Hall of Fame whose inductees included Fred Bradna, Struppi Hanneford, the Riding Davenport, Clyde Beatty, the Flying Concellos, Mickey King, the Nelson Family, clowns Shorty Flem and Emmett Kelly, Cheerful Gardner, the Zaccinins, and the Wallendas. Missing from the list were the two men who put it together for many years: Orrin Davenport and Eddie Stimson.

After playing some non-Shrine indoor dates in the spring, the show went under canvas as the Royal Sanger Circus using an old Circus World Museum big top. The tented tour was not a rousing success as the show experienced many open days, including one ten day layoff. Highlight of the performance was the ninety-four year old Katherine Hanneford working horses. She presumably set a record as the oldest regular performer in American circus history each time she entered the ring. In the late summer the show played fairs in New York state, and in the fall had some Southern Shrine dates.

The Hubert Castle Circus, produced by John Zerbin, had two units out, calling them the Gold and the Blue. The Gold troupe by far had the longer season, opening in Grand Rapids in late January, and closing in Chattanooga in early November with few layoffs in between. A big city Shrine circus, it appeared in Fort Wayne, Minneapolis, Portland, and Seattle, along with a number of smaller towns. It also played a string of dates in western Canada, the mountain states, the Southwest, and even one date in Utica, New York. The Blue unit opened in Flint, Michigan in mid-January, was resurrected in Columbus in April, made six dates in Manatoba in April and May, and closed in Billings, Montana in late June after two Utah dates. Reports of business being down circulated, but a rumor that paydays were missed was apparently not true. A six day stand for the Toronto Shrine in August was under a canvas big top for the first time. The Castle show plans to repeat this trick in 1984.

The American Continental Circus, owned by the Matthew J. Gatti family, had a number of dates for local Shrines, as well as for police and fire groups, the Knights of Columbus, and at least once for the Lions. It opened in Nacogoches, Texas in mid-February, and after touring the western states and Canada, closed in El Paso in early October. They called it the Canadian International Circus while north of the border. The performance included Tommy and Pom Pom Donoho's fine elephant act. This one was

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GENERAL ADMISSION
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"The First Family of the Air, The Flying Gaonas • A Fiesta of Sight & Sound • The Incredible Motorcycle Riding Lion • Clowns • Highwire Daredevils • Elephants • Real Mexican Folklore Dancing"

Suarez-Gaona used this attractive newspaper ad for its performance at Pompano, Florida in July. Arnold Brito collection.

Auditorium Bros. all the way except for a late February canvas date for the Richardson, Texas firefighters.

The granddaddy of indoor circus, Hamid-Morton, played mostly in the East, and mostly for the Shrine. Soon before the show appeared in Pittsburgh a local politician used the slogan "Stop the Circus" in his campaign. He was referring to the city council, not Hamid-Morton, but the Shrine was not amused. A snow storm in Morristown, New Jersey on April 19, held the opening night crowd to 500 die-hards. Bob Atterbury continued as manager, and in the fall he produced his traditional Shrine dates in Austin, San Antonio, Ft. Worth, and Dallas.

Alberto Zoppe's Circo Italia or Circus Europa had February Shrine dates in Buffalo, and Rochester. It was Zoppe's first time at Buffalo, and his

wife Sandra wrote the program as a poem. In the fall, the show had its annual performance in Little Rock. Ian Garden's Garden Bros. Circus had the Shrine in Allentown, and Reading, Pa., and a group of Canadian dates, including the grandstand show at the Canadian National Exposition in Toronto. Eddie Zaccchini produced a few Shrine circuses, including Chicago's, and had a fine three ring tent show at the Florida State Fair in Tampa in February. He called his troupe Olympic International Circus, and in an April interview stated business was up 15-20% over 1982. Sam T. Polack carried on at age seventy-five with Shrine circuses in Ohio, Arkansas, and West Virginia. At Parma, Ohio Harry Mills handled the concessions.

Grace McIntosh's M & M Circus played a series of Shrine dates in Iowa and Nebraska in April and May. Later in the year, she did Mt. Clemens, Michigan for the police, and was near Detroit around Labor Day. Uncle George Hubler had a varied season. He had a number of indoor Shrine dates in Ohio, and Iowa in the spring. During the summer he played some fairs, and at Elkhart, Indiana he used the George Hanneford big top, and many of that show's acts. In August, he set up a grandstand at a Dayton shopping center, the first stand of this type for him. In the fall, Hubler played the Oklahoma City Shrine Circus.

Ron Kelroy worked under Shrine auspices in many cities including St. Louis, and Louisville. It was his first time at the latter. His performance included medieval jousting, an oddball feature. In July he appeared at Milwaukee's Summerfest for the thirteenth straight year, and in October played the Illinois State Fair for Wendy's Hamburgers. The Carden International Circus, owned by George and Larry Carden, had some Wisconsin Shrine dates in February and March, apparently in conjunction with Bill Kay. Later they appeared for temples in Texas, North Dakota, Idaho, Indiana, Arkansas, Iowa, Wyoming, and Florida. The Hamilton County Fair, near Cincinnati, had them as a grandstand show. In the fall, they bought a 200' by 120' Bruno tent for a string of Texas Shrine dates. Besides his Wisconsin dates, William Kay worked for Shrines in New York state, West Virginia, Florida, and Alabama.

The Coronas Circus, owned by Charles Coronas, Sr., also carried the Shrine banner. Among other cities, they appeared in Sarasota, Indianapolis, and Little Rock. They were also the grandstand attraction at the North Georgia State Fair. The Donnie Johnson Clyde Bros. show Shrine circused in Pennsylvania, Iowa, Illinois, Texas and Louisiana. James Hetzer's Intercontinental Circus had small town Shrine bookings along the Ohio River.

Paul Kaye's Continental Circus performed for the Evansville, Indiana Shrine in November. His outfit spent much of the year in Hawaii, and Toyko where he was producer-director of the Korakuen Great American Circus. Bob Snowden again put five rings of acts together for the Manchester, New Hampshire temple in April. Soon afterwards he was off to Trinidad where he produced that island's first indoor circus. Wayne McCary had his usual Maine Shrine dates, and in September organized the circus for the Eastern States Exposition at West Springfield, Massachusetts. It was called the Budweiser Super Circus.

Among other indoor shows, Jim Nordmark's International All Star Circus out of Sarasota traveled on thirteen trucks, five of which were show-owned, for thirty-eight weeks starting in February. The show made one nighters in school gyms and auditoriums for sponsors. Hines Rucker managed the troupe. Jose Cole's International Circus exhibited in the Dakotas and Minnesota in March and April, in Florida in July and August, and other dates later on. The Emmett Kelly Jr. Circus appeared in arenas and auditoriums.

James M. Cole's All Star Circus played its usual school gym dates under auspices starting in January. He tried retirement, and found it not to his liking. Later in the year he placed an "at liberty" ad in the trade press, and in the fall began booking dates for his show for 1984. Bill Garden's Holiday Hippodrome Circus had a long season of auditorium dates in the East, Midwest and South, and Tim Winds' Show Time Northwest made similar dates in Oregon and Washington. Beck's Circorama, yet another school show, toured the Southeast, and Walter Child's All Star Circus did the same in New England. Borger Bros.-Circus Berlin, produced by Norman Borger and Elton Berlin, played the Wheaton, Illinois fairgrounds for the local police. They later had stands around the Chicago area.

For many small troupes only fragmentary information was available. Todd Robinson, Bill Phillips, and Tom Cathro owned the Star Spangled Circus, a fund raising show out of New Jersey. No route was published, and no dates are known. Norbert Kreisch produced an arena show called Circorama in New Orleans in April, and spent much of the year performing his gorilla act. The Wenatchee Youth Circus played Oregon and Washington, and John Winn's Europorama Circus appeared in California and Washington. The Peanut Circus was in Texas and the Southeast. Corky's Magic Circus, really a magic show presented in clown makeup, toured the country. Adams Bros. exhibited at Princeton, North Carolina on June 1.



The fancy circus letterhead was alive and well in 1983. This selection is a cross section of all phases of the industry—tented, indoors, and circus arts troupes. Letterheads courtesy Don Marcks.

Earl Tegg's TNT and Royal Olympic Circus was the oldest of the shopping center promotion shows. During its twenty-third year it traveled from February to October, mostly in the West and Midwest with a performance which included a trampoline act, juggling and a clown. The half hour show played to 8000 people at a mall in San Bernardino, California from March 31 to April 2. Lloyd Lowery had a similar show called the All American Circus at malls in California, and Nevada. A third mall circus was the Royal American-Royal Palace Circus which appeared in the South and the Northeast. All three were one ring affairs.

Years ago, circuses sponsored gambling; today casinos sponsor circuses. Joe Bauer and Bill Hall put on a one ring show under a big top in front of Caesar's Palace in Atlantic City. Called Caesar's Circus, it featured Tony Diano's elephants, and John Herriott's high school horse. Both the Hilton and Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas had Carlos Farfan's Circus D'Carlo in their parking lots. His outfit used a Canobbio tent seating 1500 for its hour and a half show. Reports of other spot dates were unconfirmed. Farfan



plans to take it on the road this coming year as a self sustaining back end attraction on a carnival. Many casinos in Nevada featured circus acts in their lounges, and the Circus Circus casino presented acts in one of its gaming rooms. As a result of the employment opportunities, Las Vegas has become the country's major juggling center in the last few years.

For many years fairs have presented circuses, generally as free attractions, and 1983 was no exception. The George Hanneford Family Circus played a string of them in Ohio, Michigan, and along the Atlantic coast states into Florida. The Hanneford and Lucio Cristiani families made up the performance which took place in a 90' by 40' tent.

Chuck Kay's Kay Bros. Circus was among other tented troupes. It made fairs in Texas in the spring, and Kansas in the late summer in a 90' by 120' big top. This one made noise about two units in 1984. Swan Bros. Circus played a number of California fairs and festivals with a new pavillion from Academy Tent. It was raised for the first time at the February Indio Date Festival in California. The Liebel Family Circus, owned by Tom Liebel, made fairs and festivals in the Midwest, South, and Pennsylvania. The one hour show took place in a tent seating 400. John M. Reid's Reid Bros. Circus made both indoor and outdoor



dates in the western and mountain states, and in Texas. Seven aerial acts, and six animal acts were reported at an Idaho stand in May, and a rented Bruno top blew down in Houston in November. This show beefed in the trade press about someone using their title. Ward Hall had his ten-in-one, called Circus Unique, on fairgrounds across America and Canada.

Tommy Bentley and Chuck Clancey had Bentley Bros. on the road for eighteen weeks as a three ring grandstand show at fairs in California, Massachusetts, and many points in between. Their season ended at Springfield, Missouri in late September. Roger E. Boyd produced some fair dates in Tennessee, and Virginia, and George Moffett had the show at the Bloomington, Illinois Fair. Klein's Attractions had the Continental Circus at a Michigan fair in August, and Jorge Barreda put together a grandstand troupe for the Mississippi State Fair in October. For the twenty-second year, Gil Gray produced the circus at the Texas State Fair in Dallas in October. A big show, it used a rented Harold Barnes tent, and was sponsored by Dr. Pepper. Heidi Wendany carried on the Funs-A-Popping Circus after the death of her mother late in 1982. Managed by Ed Russell, the show toured in the spring, and later had an Arkansas fair date.

Circus arts troupes continued to

Ford Bros. trailer seat wagon purchased from Cliff Vargas and rebuilt by Gopher Davenport and crew. Buddy Calhoun photo.



Carlos Farfan set up his Circus D'Carlo at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas for a spot date during the summer. The Italian tent was red and white striped with blue trim on the sidewall. Bill Biggerstaff photo.

flourish in 1983. The No Elephant Circus from New York City called their show "The Amazing Accidental Circus." It assisted local symphonies teach music appreciation as the clowns acted out various musical instruments, and the juggler illustrated rhythm with his tricks. Troupe included Tony Duncan, the 1982 International Juggling Association's seven ball champion, and production was choreographed by Michael Christensen, a co-founder of the Big Apple Circus.

Another new wave circus was the Pickle Family Circus based in San Francisco, and headed by Larry Pisoni. The show worked only for non-profit organizations, and sponsors included child care centers, legal aid societies, and senior citizen groups. It received funding from several arts councils including the National Endowment for the Arts. The show traveled on three trucks, and had seating for 1200 for outdoor engagements. The Pickle Circus had a five piece band, and its one ring performance was heavy on juggling, acrobatics, and clowning.

Other shows in this genre included the Royal Lichtenstein 1/4 Ring Sidewalk Circus from San Jose, California which played the Southwest, Midwest, and South. The Two Penny Circus had a college date in Pennsylvania in February. The show featured mime, and

a talking clown, a throwback to the mid-nineteenth century. The Make-A-Circus exhibited in California.

The Paul Eagles Circus Luncheon Club held its annual circus at Downey, California on March 8. The receipts from this one day season benefited crippled and hospitalized children. The Showfolks of Sarasota gave their once a year performance at the home town Roberts Arena on December 3. The Great All American 'Y' Youth Circus, directed by Warren Wood, played school gyms in California. A volunteer show, all the kinkers were teenagers. The Windy City Circus Troupe was a similar outfit playing fairs and festivals around the Chicago area. Performers have to leave this one when they turn twenty-one. The Circus Allelui was founded by Bill Greenman, and affiliated with the Calvary Temple Church in Tampa. Performers were not paid, and all held other jobs. A free will offering was made at the end of each performance to cover expenses.

The Circus World Museum's permanent circus had a new Leaf big top. The performance included Bill and Shannon Woodcock and their elephants; the Flores troupe, cloud swing; Trudy Strong, dalmations and horses; and Jimmy Williams, clown and January mule act. Rick Percy led a fine five piece band. The Chicago parade was cancelled, a victim of local politics. At Circus World in Florida attendance was down for the third year in a row, and reports were that Mattel was trying to peddle it. A wild west show and a circus were presented, both using a ten piece band. Roman Schmitt was gored by one of his elephants in mid-April, and was off for five months. David McMillan, the cat trainer, left the park in December. He and park officials were suing one another at last report. On a happier note, two baby elephants were born there during the summer. Other circuses appearing at fixed sites were the Florida State University Circus which played in a

Elephant trailer used by Suarez-Gaona with hay strapped on rear. Arnold Brito photo.



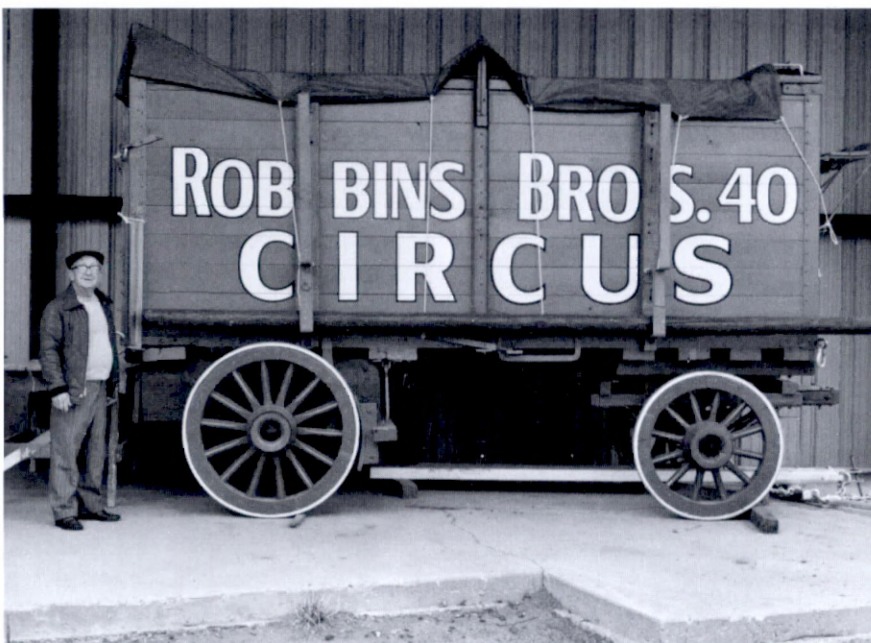
60' round top with three 30' middles at Calloway Gardens in Georgia, a grandstand show produced by Tim Tegge at Marriott's Great American Park near Santa Clara, California, and Circus Royale at a Massachusetts park. Bill Bliesner produced the last which used a 93' round top tent with a 40' middle for its one ring performance. Benson's Wild Animal Farm in New Hampshire had a circus as did Great Escape Park in Lake George, New York. The latter featured Bill and Ann Cramer. Peru, Indiana's Circus City Festival show was marred by the deaths of two flyers in a car wreck during the July run. An old Robbins Bros. baggage wagon, owned and restored by Ollie Miller, was in the festival's annual parade.

The opening whistle never blew for one circus that made news in 1983. The Moscow Circus's tour of nine Canadian cities was abandoned at the last minute as local governments cancelled the show in protest of the Russian downing of a Korean airliner. Fifty-five performers, nine horses, and eight bears were stranded in Halifax until the government made an exception to its ban on Aeroflot flights into Canada. The booker reportedly dropped a bundle.

Ninety year old Merle Evans had a busy year. In January he led a concert at the Windjammers Unlimited convention in Sarasota, and later the American Bandmaster's Association honored him at their convention. The governor of Missouri declared March 5 Merle Evans day, and Charles Kuralt featured him on his television show.

More outstanding circus books became available in 1983 than in many a season. Bev Kelly and Tito Gaona published their autobiographies, Cyril Mills updated his, and Arthur Saxon edited P.T. Barnum's letters. Chap-pie Fox published his long awaited opus on baggage horses, Joanne Joys brought out her work on wild animals trainers, and David Hammarstrom's book on Russian circuses came off the press. For the real aficionado the sleeper hit was Orin King's volume on Willie Sells and Kansas circuses.

The grim reaper had his usual big year. Deaths included Eileen Voise, member of the Flying Voises; Charles Moroski, famous Ringling-Barnum horseman; Jim Rison, Polack PR man, and phone promotion innovator; J. Adrian Rosenburg, brother of Paul Lewis (Rosenburg) of the old Lewis Bros. Circus; Betty Broadbent, great sideshow attraction and first member of San Francisco's Tatoo Art Hall of Fame; Ernest Schlee Milette, acrobat and perhaps the last American to have performed extensively on nineteenth century circuses; Jack Dempsey, boxer and feature on Sells-Floto and Cole Bros.; Ethel Lucky, calliapist at Cir-



Ollie Miller, on left, restored this old Robbins Bros. baggage wagon in time for the annual Peru Circus City Festival parade. Fred Dahlinger photo.

cus World Museum for many years; Joe McMahon, executive on Hugo and Deland based circuses; Larry French, elephant trainer; Charlie Rivel, legendary European clown; Victoria Codona, sister of Alfredo Codona and member of their troupe; Gene Randow, clown on Polack and Castle; Bobby Kay, Beatty and Ringling clown; Mack MacDonald, premier elephant trainer; Danny Chapman, Ringling clown and author; and Louis P. Stern, co-founder of the Polack Bros. Circus.

Best efforts to the contrary, this compilation doubtless contains errors of both commission and omission. Mistakes are inevitable when writing on a subject as ephemeral as this. My thanks to Fred Dahlinger, Agnes King, Joe Fleming, Marv Krieger, Bill Biggerstaff, John Polacsek, Fred Heatley, Frank Mara, Kenny Hull, Jim McRoberts, Arnold Brito, Ralph Hartman, Mike Sporrer, Arthur Saxon, Buddy Calhoun, Fred Pfening Jr., Jim Parker, Jerry Cash, Dick Flint, Al Stencell, Dave Price, and John Van Matre, all of whom provided data or illustrations. Special recognition is due Tom Parkinson and Joe Bradbury for assistance far beyond the call of duty. They have been pillars of this organization for over a quarter century, and both continue to make an immense contribution. *Circus Report* was a major source of information, and I happily acknowledge the great service Don Marks, the Frank Queen of the late twentieth century, provides in publishing an amazing amount of show news each week.

BARNUM & BAILEY TRAIN IN EUROPE

An interesting article concerning the train built for the 1898-1902 European tour of Barnum & Bailey appears in the October 1983 issue of *Model Railway Constructor*. The author, Chris Leigh, did a significant amount of research and uncovered much new information and photographs. Leigh will be publishing another article, including additional information and plans suitable for model making. Copies of the magazine are available from Mail Order Dept., Ian Allan Ltd., Terminal House, Shepperton, Middlesex, England, TW17 8AS. Specify the number of copies desired and your VISA or Master Charge number.

ROBBINS CORRECTION

The text of page 45 of the November-December 1983 *Bandwagon* was out of order. It should have read, "The France wagon was definitely in the parade in Meriden, along with Africa (often called India or Hippo). I remember the Eiffel Tower painted on the side of the France tableau, and Africa was painted dark blue with gold carvings. All of the rest of the wagons were in the parade. United States, Great Britain, Belgium and Russia were painted dark red, blue, green etc. Russia was red with silver carvings, and the air calliope green with gold pipes and carvings. I also remember the big top was 'khaki color' and fairly new. The menagerie and side show were old. I agree now with the comment by Wes Herwig, the show had a run-down look; however, to myself, a 14 year old boy, Robbins Bros. looked great. We were in a depression and paint and new tents were hard to come by with some shows."

The Development of the Railroad Circus

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

Part Two

The Railroad Circus in 1872

The late 1860's and early 1870's were times of significant growth for the American circus. Multiple tents housing a multitude of features became a standard feature of the overland circus. In response to the rise of large urban centers, showmen increased the size of their operations to accommodate the swelling ranks which sought amusement at the circus. The large amount of capital invested required the proprietors to seek a maximum day to day rate of return, one which was not obtained in smaller towns where they did not fill the tents to capacity.

The circus which first succeeded on a greatly expanded scale developed a new mode of rail operation. This new marvel, the Barnum show, caused a revolution in the subsequent conduct of the American circus. At the beginning of 1872, however, it was regarded as just another railroad circus and merited no special attention.

Rail movements were an accepted fact by 1872. The compiler of the *Clipper's* 1872 circus special noted that "many of the largest shows during the coming season will travel almost entirely by railroad, chartering for this purpose special trains, and visiting only the larger cities and towns." Of the 31 shows covered in the *Clipper's* 1872 circus special, eight of them announced their intent to travel all or part of the season by rail.⁴⁶ The Barnum rail show was not the only flat car outfit as the John Robinson circus advised they would use a 30 car train of stocks, flats and passenger cars. Confirming the Robinson's show use of flats is an account in the July 13, 1872 *Clipper* which specified that several cages were being carried on platform cars, a contemporary term for flats.⁴⁷

It is important to note that the Barnum overland show was already so large the managers had to ascertain whether or not a population center would cover their circus' daily expense. In 1871 the Barnum circus announced a tour through Maine as far as Bangor, but reneged on the plan because too many bridges did not support the wagons, and because there were too many small towns enroute "which could not possibly pay the running expenses."⁴⁸ Examination of the 1871 route dis-



Although it was small compared to later circuses, the 1872 Barnum circus was a veritable giant among pygmies when compared to its contemporaries. The extent of the multiple tent operation is shown in this

closes it included small northeastern towns never again played by the Barnum show, dates it was forced to play by virtue of their presence on the long road to a larger site. Going on rails in 1872, the Barnum show quickly moved to the Middle Atlantic and then to the Midwest, visiting only the larger population centers and bypassing the crossroad towns where it had formerly been obliged to exhibit.

American towns and cities became divided into a two tier system as a result of the large scale railroad circus. The larger population centers became the province of the big flat car circus with its ability to make long jumps and entertain patrons on a grand scale. The smaller towns were left to the overland and smaller gilly style rail shows which could not compete with the larger railroad shows. This split was quickly recognized by the operators of smaller shows, who looked upon the mounting of the larger circuses on rails with favor. It left a large part of the country to their lesser outfits which then had to compete only against shows their own size.⁴⁹

The reporters in the big cities viewed it differently. After visiting the Barnum show a reporter for the St. Louis (Mo.) *Republican* noted "they have shown us how big a thing a traveling exhibition may be, and also how harmoniously it may work. It will be a

view taken at Kalamazoo, Michigan on October 24, 1872. The flat cars on the right side are believed to be some of the cars built by the Gill firm for the show. Albert Conover collection.

long time before the people will have much faith in, or desire to see a small show."⁵⁰

Circus trains were among the first privately owned ones handled by the railroads. They were similar to today's unit trains employed by various companies to haul special commodities, coal for example, between source and use facilities. An important difference is that today's unit trains have fixed origins and destinations, unlike the circus which moved according to a strategic plan designed to expose it to the maximum number of citizens from whom it could extract admission.⁵¹ The private circus trains were an expense item, generating no income while requiring the infusion of significant sums of money to acquire and maintain. Without the trains the larger circuses would have driven the smaller overland shows out of existence, while making a futile attempt to pay their ever increasing expenses.

W.C. Coup

The importance of W.C. Coup in the history of the American circus has become increasingly controversial with the passage of time. For years he has been erroneously credited with being the originator of the railroad circus. His accomplishments have been misunderstood since about 1901, when a memoir of his life was published by

a ghost writer working from notes which Coup had made during his life. Coup's actual contributions and executive ability have also been questioned in light of increasing research into the career of his partner, P.T. Barnum. Two recent critical works concerning Barnum indicate he was a complete showman of immense ability and foresight, contradicting the general opinion that the only contribution he made to the circus business was his famous name.⁵² The fact that the most successful years of Coup's career were those spent as Barnum's partner has cast additional doubt on Coup's true ability.

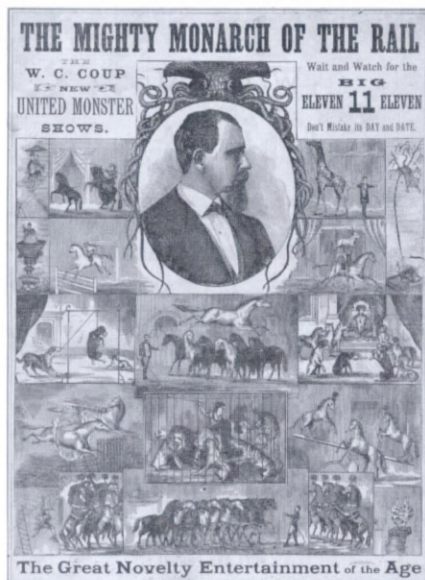
There is good reason, however, to bestow upon Coup the credit for being the manager who ushered in a new era in the circus business. Bearing witness to his accomplishments was no less an authority than Peter Sells, a competitor whose circus career started the same year in which the Barnum show went on rails. Sells' "Recollections of a Quarter Century" in the 1895 *Dramatic News* circus special contained the following appraisal of Coup's achievement:

"In 1872 the most envied circus manager was W.C. Coup. He had met with marvellous success as co-partner and manager of P.T. Barnum's World's Fair, and, by the way, that was the date of the great evolution in circus business. It was then discovered that greater possibilities were attainable for tented shows than had been dreamed of before. Taking rail and exhibiting at important railroad centres; enlarged seating capacity; greater companies; more extensive advertising; greater receipts—all came upon the circus fraternity like an avalanche. Old managers when told of the large expenses, unheard-of receipts and unexampled success of the Barnum show, so ably managed by Mr. Coup, shook their heads in doubt and refused to believe.

"To W.C. Coup, more than any other individual, living or dead, are the people indebted for the progress toward the stupendous that has been made by circuses. He met with disaster and died in Florida a few months ago, financially bankrupt and broken in spirit. He was a splendid fellow, generous to a fault, and proud of his reputation."

Those who were skeptical of Coup's undertaking in 1872 did not question the technical feasibility of rail travel per se, but the logistics of the project. No showman had been able to coordinate rail movements with large show operations before Coup mastered it in 1872. The show succeeded in putting on three shows a day, almost without fail, a fact pointed out in a full page ad placed by the Barnum show in the April 19, 1873 *Clipper*. In this boastful account tinged with the tone of "I told you so," Barnum stated "when my

railroad project was first talked of last season, the very men who now advertise so largely offered to wager that I could not travel my own show by rail; but I did and gave three performances the entire season, with a few exceptions." It wasn't the "first" rail show mantle that the effort earned, but the scale of the undertaking which made it so deserving of notice.



W. C. Coup, pictured here, was indeed "The Mighty Monarch of the Rail" in 1872 when he was the first showman to put a large circus on railroad tracks. This illustration is from the cover of an 1880 courier for Coup's own circus which did not compare with his earlier partnership with P.T. Barnum. Pfening Archives.

The success of the enterprise was largely due to the development of an overall philosophy concerning how the railroad could be used to the circus' best advantage, the approach covering such diverse areas as the organization of the show, the method of loading the train, the negotiation of special rates for carrying the show and the arrangement of cut rate excursion trains for customers on show day. The show was marketed in a new and more effective manner, including a massive advertising campaign initiated several months before show day.

Perhaps Coup's most important accomplishment was the development of a functional plan which enabled the show to move in a timely fashion. With hundreds of workmen and thousands of pieces of equipment under his jurisdiction, he was forced to organize the show in a paramilitary fashion in order to avoid chaos. One aspect of this organizational effort was the definition of tasks and their assignment to particular workmen. An 1873 reporter noted "Each man of the 300 employees has his part and

does nothing else. If he is a canvasman he has nothing to do with the horses; if a groom he has nothing to do with the loading of trains or with the tents, if a railroad man he does nothing but load and unload the cars."⁵³ Names were cumbersome and difficult to remember, so by 1873 each man wore a numbered badge by which he was known.⁵⁴ The level of organization which Coup achieved frequently drew favorable response from local reporters who admired the split second precision, observing "everything goes like clock work."⁵⁵ The orderliness of the operation was an extension of Coup's personality. The August 3, 1872 *Evansville (In.) Journal* characterized Coup as being "as little like the ordinary showman as the show is like an ordinary one. A modest, active, businesslike gentleman, who studies show business as an art; he does not seek to make [a show] of himself."

The regimen which Coup instituted on the Barnum circus was mimicked by other showmen. A review of the 1874 Buckley Hippodrome flatcar show noted "The discipline is so perfect, and the working forces so admirably organized that within two hours from the close of the evening entertainment, everything is snug on board the train."⁵⁶

One aspect of circus organization which had not been mentioned in previous accounts was the act of placing a number on each wagon. It afforded a simple means to specify a certain vehicle. The need to identify a particular wagon probably occurred when more than one of a particular baggage wagon was used on a show. The "lion cage" or "Juno" would suffice to identify a den or tableau, but how were two identical canvas wagons to be differentiated? The earliest mention of the practice is found in an 1875 Barnum show sale catalog, which listed the numbers affixed to baggage wagons, cages and museum wagons.

Overland circuses of the mid 1800's may have secured show lots near railroad stations because it gave out of town patrons who arrived by train easy access to the circus. It was not until 1872, when W. C. Coup first institutionalized the practice of circuses arranging with the railroads to schedule special reduced fare excursion trains to bring large masses of visitors to the show. The innovation brought additional money in the ticket wagon at minimal cost, while simultaneously benefitting the carriers. The population of the city in which the circus was appearing was temporarily increased, assuring the show of filled tents. More often than not, a large crowd of unsuccessful ticket seekers was left waiting outside the ticket wagons at showtime. The practice permitted the circus to exhibit in small and medium size cities, which

by themselves could not provide adequate patrons to support it.

Louis E. Cooke, a longtime circus man who was employed as General Railway Contractor and Excursion Agent by Barnum & Bailey in 1889, later recorded that the show advertised and worked the excursions up to fifty or seventy-five miles from the circus.⁵⁷ The subsequent success of these ventures is attested to by Barnum & Bailey data for the tour of 1888. That year the show arranged 568 excursions which brought 419,026 patrons to the show during the 192 day season. The largest number of excursionists on any particular train was 3,264. The largest number on any particular day was 6,143, with a daily average of 2,183.⁵⁸ It is not surprising that the railroads looked favorably upon this aspect of dealing with the Barnum circus.

Another extraordinary step taken by Coup to improve relations with the railroads was the placement of cards in the local papers, such as one in the June 18, 1872 Cleveland (Oh.) *Daily Herald*, which acknowledged the cooperation of the Atlantic and Great Western Railway and its Superintendent, C.W. Bradley. The road's prompt and safe handling of the trains allowed the show to execute its business in a most effective manner, according to Coup's notice.

The 1872 Barnum Railer

The Barnum circus was founded as a large overland wagon show in early 1871. Coup enticed Barnum to join him in the new venture when most men of Barnum's wealth and age, 60, would have been enjoying retirement. The partnership was later expanded to include Dan Castello and S.H. Hurd, Barnum's son-in-law, as a day to day representative of Barnum.

The partnership fielded what was described as the largest circus yet to travel in America. It enjoyed phenomenal success in 1871, reportedly earning \$450,000 on the \$100,000 the partners had invested in the enterprise.⁵⁹ Concerning the management of the show, perhaps the most balanced appraisal of the division of effort between Barnum and Coup can be found in a tribute which W.C. Coup sent to the *New York Clipper* about a month after his former partner died on April 11, 1891. The memo, printed in the May 16, 1891 issue, included the following: "As far as the technical details of the show were concerned, Mr. Barnum was absolutely ignorant, but in its place he possessed an amount of commercial daring and business sagacity which amply atoned for his other shortcomings. He was the most daring manager that ever lived, and would pay almost any price for an attraction. He was easily duped,

and had to be almost constantly watched to prevent unnecessary expenditure. Possibly this very fearlessness in money matters was the secret of his success, although without a doubt, such lavish and apparently wasteful expenditure, if applied to commercial undertakings, would prove eminently disastrous."

While the 1872 Barnum show didn't travel on "three trains of thirty-eight cars each," it was unquestionably "The Greatest Show on Earth." Pfening Archives.

Barnum played the role of an executive very well, avoiding detailed involvement in the day to day operations except to make sure that the show was making as much money as possible at each stand. Coup attended to the typical business affairs of the show, with Castello handling the performance and Hurd the money.

An exception to this division of du-

ties concerned press relations. Barnum personally penned a number of the show's press releases and communicated directly with journalists to maintain and improve the reputation of the Barnum circus. As Arthur Saxon has observed, Barnum himself was probably the show's biggest attraction, and it was he who entertained the press at affairs such as the torchlight parades on the Saturday night preceding the annual New York opening in the 1880's.

The Barnum managers did not enter the realm of the railroad circus totally without prior exposure. One of the partners, Dan Castello, had participated in the quasi rail show which he, James Nixon and Egbert C. Howes operated in 1868 and 1869. When the Barnum show was first being assembled in early 1871, ten carloads of show property were sent east by rail from Delevan, Wisconsin.⁶⁰ Delevan had been the base of operations for the 1870 Coup and Castello show which traveled overland and by Great Lakes steamer.⁶¹ The only confirmed rail move the 1871 show undertook occurred after a grueling stand at Waterville, Maine, on Saturday, July 29, 1871. The enormous crowds which patronized the show forced the management to give a continuous performance as opposed to three distinct shows. To give the tired ring stock a much needed rest, they were shipped by rail to Lewiston, Maine, the next date, saving their energy. The remainder of the troupe made the long 58 mile haul in the normal manner.⁶²

One secondary chronicle of the early days of the Barnum show states that the frequent shipment of the ring stock by rail in 1871 impressed Coup with the feasibility of moving the entire show by rail, an observation which has not been confirmed elsewhere.⁶³ Coup himself revealed that the adoption of rail travel was undertaken when it was realized that the show could make much more money by simply playing the big cities and avoiding the small towns.

The Barnum show made its debut as a railroad circus in 1872 using one of the same practices which railroad circuses of the 1860's employed, namely the leasing of cars from the railroads along whose tracks they were routed. The difficulties encountered with several sets of these "system" cars led the managers to order the first conventional railroad cars owned by a circus. Significantly, they chose this option rather than to downscale the operation, the choice made by all previous rail showmen.

The limitations of gilly type rail circuses were underscored by pronouncements such as "We have too large a show to be conveyed by railroad." This statement, from an 1871 Van Amburgh ad, was indicative of industry

opinion that rail travel suited only the smaller operations. The situation created was difficult indeed for a large circus. It could not travel on rail without downsizing nor could it survive traveling overland, withering in the small towns which failed to fill its tents. It was this dilemma which Coup abolished when he successfully converted the large Barnum overland show into the first large scale railroad circus.

The 1872 Barnum rail show was not the first circus to make daily jumps by rail, nor did it originate the "piggy-back" method of hauling wheeled vehicles on flat cars, and there is still no evidence to confirm that W.C. Coup personally perfected the end loading system employed to load the flats. There are, however, two innovations which can be assigned to the Barnum show's efforts. The first is that the 1872 Barnum show was the earliest successful attempt to place a *complete large overland circus*, including all annexes and a parade, on rails and move it daily from date to date.⁶⁴ The second achievement of the 1872 Barnum rail show was its purchase of the first conventional railroad cars built for a circus. Spalding & Rogers bought a string of cars in 1856, but they were probably unconventional wagon-railroad car hybrids which were not duplicated in the subsequent years. The Barnum train was the first which was both circus owned and incorporated the stock and flat cars which typified the fully developed railroad circus of the next eighty four years.

The phenomenal success of the Barnum outfit led to a change in the meaning of the term "railroad circus." Prior to 1872 the words implied an abbreviated form of circus, lacking a side-show or menagerie or both, and dispensing with all but the simplest elements of a parade. Following the advent of the 1872 Barnum outfit, it meant a complete multiple tented show traveling by railroad cars and featuring a long and varied street parade as a daily free attraction.

Interpreting Coup's Account

To simplify the establishment of a "first," it is desirable to have a black and white situation, as though at the appointed moment someone flicked a switch for an instantaneous change, coming abruptly, clearly and concisely. This desire has often led to complete attribution of a device to one inventor, where in reality many contributed, by both failure and success, to the final practical effort. Well known examples of this simplification are Eli Whitney and the cotton gin, Cyrus McCormick and the reaper, and Robert Fulton and the steamboat. Much the same is true of the birth of the railroad circus. Many circuses made a con-

siderable number of moves by rail before 1872, but most sources incorrectly identify W.C. Coup as the individual who flicked the switch when the 1872 Barnum show took to the rails.

AMUSEMENTS. 1872

REMEMBER,
NOT TILL
FRIDAY AND SATURDAY,
September 6 and 7,
WILL
JOHN ROBINSON'S
MASTODON
4-TENT SHOW!
Museum, Aquarium,
Menagerie, and Circus,
The Most Complete and Comprehensive Travelling Exhibition in the World!
ORGANIZED AT A COST OF OVER HALF A MILLION DOLLARS!
BE EXHIBITED IN WASHINGTON.
BEAR THIS IN MIND.

Superseding in Cost, Variety, and Attraction any Show ever organized in America. A Vast Consolidation of Attractive and Entertaining Instruction and Amusement.

After an introduction to the immense outer Pavilions, which are crowded with wondrous examples of animated nature, representative

Birds, Beasts, Reptiles, and Amphibious Monsters,

Collected from every section of the habitable globe, the fame of this Great National Exhibition, prominent in which will be found the monster

Performing Elephant "Empress,"
The Largest Animal in the United States.

A Herd of Camels and Buffaloes.

THE LARGEST SEA LION

Ever Captured Alive, weighing over 1,400 pounds; also, several smaller ones.

While not approaching the size of Barnum's aggregation, the 1872 John Robinson Circus was nevertheless the only other railroad circus to feature more than the big show performance and a parade. Pfening Archives.

The attribution of the innovation solely to Coup is largely the result of secondary writers quoting passages contained in *Sawdust and Spangles*, a ghost written autobiography of Coup constructed from a series of articles by Forrest Crissey which originally appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* between November 18, 1899 and June 23, 1900.⁶⁵ The *Post* noted that Coup made copious notes throughout his life, explaining in part the general accuracy of his accounts.⁶⁶ Coup's

notes regarding the 1872 Barnum railer were assembled by Crissey and published as "Moving The Big Show" in the April 14, 1900 *Saturday Evening Post*. The dates and places cited in the piece agree, without error, with the first half of the 1872 Barnum route. Two of the most significant events in the chronology have been verified in local newspaper accounts, certifying the general accuracy of the article.

One cannot tag Crissey as the originator of the legend, as Coup himself left the notes which Crissey used, and also claimed credit for the adoption of rail travel during his lifetime. The programs used by Coup's 1881 circus contained a statement reading "In 1872 I put on the road the first railroad show of any magnitude that ever traveled, and built the first sleeping, passenger, box and palace stock cars ever owned by any show in the world."⁶⁷ The general accuracy of this statement was compromised only a year later. Shortly after his own show failed in 1882, a Detroit reporter quoted Coup as saying "I was the first showman in this country to make use of railroad cars and trains . . . My show [i.e. the Barnum circus] was the first ever drawn from place to place by special train."⁶⁸ By the time of Coup's death in 1895 at least one other showman was perpetuating the legend. Thomas L. Grenier, a Chicago resort owner turned circus proprietor in the late 1880's, was an angel of Coup's last venture, the 1891 Rolling Palaces. Shortly after Coup died, Grenier told an interviewer "He [Coup] was the first man to put a circus on railroads instead of wagons and country roads."⁶⁹ The slight simplification between Coup's 1881 story and Grenier's tribute embodies the crux of the continued misinterpretation of Coup's account. Close reading of Crissey's edited version reveals that Coup did not claim to originate the "railroad circus" per se, but did correctly consider the implementation of a *special train* to handle a *complete circus* as his own innovation.

Since no other detailed account of the early days of the Barnum railer is known to exist, it is worthwhile to critically analyze the Coup-Crissey version of the events. The passages quoted below are generally arranged according to their appearance in the *Post* article, with a few exceptions made to improve the continuity of this review.

The First Attempt to Move a Circus By Rail [Subtitle]

Like all other circuses of the day, the big show of which I was manager traveled by wagon.

Coup's conversion of the 1871 Barnum wagon show into a flat car operation did not create the first railroad circus. The statement would have been more accurate if Coup, or per-

haps Crissey, had clarified the change in the nature of the railroad circus by interjecting the adjective "Big" in front of circus. Perhaps in the writing of the article Crissey inadvertently changed the meaning of Coup's patchwork notes.

Previous to 1872, the "railroad circus" was an unknown quantity.

Small shows had, prior to this time, traveled to a limited extent by rail; but not with accommodations like ours. Such shows consisted of seven or eight cars . . .

Rectifying the earlier overstatement, Coup-Crissey did not claim the 1872 Barnum circus was the *first* railroad circus, but tried to specify that it was the *first large scale* railroad show. The 1872 Barnum railer included not only the big show, but at least four annexes and a complete daily street parade. There was a considerable difference in the size and content of the Barnum railroad show compared to the standard "railroad circus" of the day. The 1870 L.B. Lent train consisted of "seven freight and other cars with two passenger cars in the rear" according to a report in the October 8, 1870 *Clipper*.

After a great deal of correspondence I went to Philadelphia and interviewed the officials of the Pennsylvania Company . . . I hung on until I finally made arrangements with them.

The 1872 annual report of the Pennsylvania Railroad provides some background to the difficulty Coup encountered. It noted "The amount of rolling stock, & c., added in 1872, though deemed ample to meet the wants of the public, proved inadequate for that object."⁷⁰ The road had added 1,542 gondolas to its existing fleet of 2,762, in an attempt to satisfy shippers' needs. The railroad's reluctance to furnish the cars could have stemmed from the shortage of cars or a desire to avoid the leasing business, as Edgar Thomson, then the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, is remembered for his development of the Pennsy into the "Standard Railroad of the World." It is not unreasonable to think the railroad wanted to avoid handling a special train on a daily basis, one which consumed siding space, required special shifting, and disrupted normal train scheduling.

The earliest published announcement of the Barnum show's intent to travel by rail which has been found is in the March 23, 1872 *Clipper*. The March 24 *New York Mercury* circus special detailed the arrangements, indicating Barnum had "chartered sixty freight and five passenger cars, with sleeping cars attached." The cars were to be "divided into two separate trains, of 33 cars each, with two locomotives for each train." The same fi-

gures are related in the April 13, 1872 *Clipper* circus special.

Factual accounts of the train's actual size in 1872 are not common. A writeup in the May 12, 1872 *Easton (Pa.) Express* indicated the entire train consisted of 60 cars and was pulled by one engine. This is a far cry from show-furnished reports of three or four trains each pulled by several locomotives. Since the show did change trains during the early part of the tour, some difference in the number of cars, due to different car lengths, is understandable, figures in the sixty to seventy car range being judged reasonable.

After much preparation we eventually fixed upon New Brunswick, New Jersey, as our first loading place. We were new at the work and so commenced loading at eight P.M. and finished the job at eight A.M.

New York Circus,

From Hippodrome Iron Buildings, 18th St., opposite Academy of Music, N. Y.
L. B. LENT, DIRECTOR.



WILL EXHIBIT AT

SHEBOYGAN, WEEK'S CIRCUS LOT, Wednesday, June 26,

THIS CELEBRATED METROPOLITAN TROUPE

Which is permanently established in a splendid two-story, occupying a frontage of 50 feet on Fourteenth Street, in the City of New York, will occupy the usual summer vacation, during which the building is closed, with a

GRAND EXCURSION BY RAILWAY

Through the country, traveling by special trains, chartered for the purpose, with the intention of giving the inhabitants of other cities and towns opportunities of witnessing a carefully selected Programme of those

BRILLIANT, EXCITING AND ELEGANT EQUESTRIAN ENTERTAINMENTS

which for years have proved one of the most popular and successful features of the public amusements of New York. It should be distinctly understood that this establishment is

The Only First-Class Circus in America,

Permanently established in a large city, conducted in Metropolitan style, and which has acquired a Metropolitan reputation, and that

THE ENTIRE MAMMOTH COMPANY,

Which has performed for many months in succession, to the largest audiences ever drawn out to any exhibition in New York, will appear at every place where entertainments are given during the present tour.

Prominent among the WORLD-RECKONED ARTISTS attached to the NEW YORK CIRCUS will be found the names of

CHARLES W. FISH,

Without exception, the best BARE-BACK, SOMERSAULT and PIROUETTE RIDER who has ever lived, who has achieved the most TRIUMPHAL successes in his CHALLENGE SOMERSET ACT on a BARE-BACK HORSE.

Mlle CAROLINE ROLLAND,

Beyond all question, the most daring and accomplished lady rider living, who has been every where received with the wildest enthusiasm in her wondrous flights from a BARE-BACK STEED.

WILLIAM DUTTON,

Whose graceful horsemanship has won the highest honors ever awarded to any Equestrian, from the most CRITICAL AUDIENCES OF ALL NATIONS, and who stands absolutely unrivalled in his famous act with his CHARMING INFANT SON, ARTHUR.

LE PETITE FRANKLIN,

THE BEAUTIFUL BABY HURDLE RIDER, on his Fairy Bare-Back Ponies.

Ads used by the 1872 Barnum show proclaimed most of the features found in the big show, the annexes and the parade. In contrast, L. B. Lent's 1872 ads were confined solely to the performance and to the big band chariot which constituted most of the abbreviated parade that show staged. Circus World Museum collection.

The train was first utilized after the April 18 stand at New Brunswick, the preceding three dates being so close as to preclude the use of the train. Considering that neither Coup or his men were experienced at the work and the suggestion that the railroad may not have been too helpful, it is not surprising it took twelve hours to load the cars.

Charles McLean, best known as boss canvasser of the Barnum show in the late 1870's and 1880's, claimed in a 1915 *Billboard* that he was "the first man to load a *fully equipped circus railway train* and move it successfully from town to town, starting it from New Brunswick, N.J., the first stand." There can be no doubt McLean was referring to the 1872 Barnum show in his claim, but there is some question whether McLean was actually on the Coup guided Barnum show or only the Barnum show which P.A. Older took out in late 1872.⁷¹

. . . no extraordinary incidents except the breaking of one camel's back — the creature having the misfortune to slip off the "runs."

The use of the term runs in this instance doesn't refer to the inclined planes used to load the flat cars but rather to the "runs" used to load the stock cars. An 1875 Barnum sale catalog lists "2 Horse Runs," the ramps by which the horses ascended to the stock cars from the ground. An 1888 sale list of the John B. Doris circus lists "1 Elephant Run."

From New Brunswick we went to Trenton, where I had hired Pullman cars for our performers and band, and cheaper cars for our laborers and other attaches.

The term "Pullman" may have been used in a generic sense in this passage. The 1873 Barnum show route book listed a conductor for the Wagner sleeping car, this vehicle furnished by one of George Pullman's competitors to house the show's premier artists. Ordinary passenger cars were converted to sleepers by replacing the seats with multiple level berths, three or four levels high.

Ours [the Barnum train] numbered sixty one [cars]. All of these, with the exception of the sleeping cars, we had hired from the railroad company.

Following what had been the accepted practice to this date, the show leased its cars from the railroad over which it would be traveling. By inference it is concluded the Pennsylvania Railroad furnished the stock, flat, and other freight cars used to haul the equipment.

It has always been a mystery to me why the railroads build themselves cars scarcely any two of which are of uniform height. Our heavy wagons would be pushed up on "runs," and, on being pushed

from one car to another, would frequently crash through the rotten boards composing the bed of the car. This would cause vexatious delays.

These statements infer the Pennsylvania furnished the circus a motley assembly of oddball, ill maintained cars, possibly in an attempt to discourage the rail operation. Frequent car failures partially explain the initial twelve hour loading period.

Coup's, or perhaps Crissey's, choice of words may be very revealing. "Pushed up the runs" and "pushed from one car to another" does not describe the normal method of loading the flats. The hook rope team pulls the wagons up the runs and the pullover team pulls the wagon from one car to another. The "push" descriptions suggest manual labor performed the tasks. It is important to note that the wagons of the 1870's, with the exception of a few parade wagons, were simply enlarged dray wagons. These baggage wagons were quite diminutive compared to the monstrous vehicles associated with the post 1900 railroad circus.

It is very surprising that Coup did not detail in his memoir the origination of the method used to load circus flats. It is always possible that the account was forgotten by Coup or eliminated by Crissey but the sheer importance of the system and the absence of commentary concerning its origins suggests it was developed by others at a different date and adopted by the show.

I was also mentally fatigued by my partner's opposition and his requests to abandon the scheme.

There is no evidence available at this date to support Coup's contention that Barnum, or Dan Castello, opposed putting the show on rails. On the contrary, Barnum wrote Rev. George H. Emerson on April 14, 1872 noting the significant improvements which would result from the rail operation, namely increased exposure to a larger market and the resultant higher profits. He did, however, confide that the benefits would accrue only if the show was able to avoid rail mishaps, a legitimate concern of a cautious businessman.⁷² The show eventually incurred three rail accidents in 1872, none of which was serious. A wreck near Erie, Pa., in June did result in the destruction of two flat cars and the freeing of several cats from their cages.⁷³

I went to the superintendent of one of the railroads on which we were to travel to Baltimore and Washington and told him I must have a lot of cars of uniform construction at any price.

Evidently the Pennsylvania's assembly of flats was a total disaster. Less than 13 days after receiving the first train, Coup sought another one to

make the trip to Baltimore for the May 1 to 4 stand. Having to change railroads to visit the desired cities, it is probable the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad furnished the second train of cars. The Pennsy may have agreed to furnish the cars only as long as the show was traveling on its rails, the typical arrangement employed in the previous years.

LYONS AND CLINTON!

ONE DAY ONLY!

THURSDAY, JUNE 3RD, 1875

COMING ON 60 R. R. CARS!



THE AMUSEMENT "BONANZA."

The Most Successful Show in the World

Now on its Third Annual Tour of the Continent.



W. W. Cole's Great New York and New Orleans

ZOOLOGICAL AND EQUESTRIAN EXPOSITION

Vastly superior to point of Magnificence! Far excelling in attraction all predecessors! In magnitude, originality, merit, strength, splendor and universal popularity and success. Without equal! Without a competitor! Without a rival! One million dollars represented by a multitude of curiosities. A legion of animals, numbers of unparalleled novelties, bands of music, a city of neotoma, a herd of Dromedaries, dens of serpents, cages of crocodiles, Native freaks and works of art, Mechanical musical instruments, Monster breathers, Sea Lions and terrestrial terrors, an Army of Men and Drones of Horses. In 1 Menagerie are Guns, Harlequines, Blunt Boks, Elanids, Giant Ostrich, Malay Tapir, Manates, (first ever exhibited) Kangaroos, Four large performers, Lion, Two monster Royal Bengal Tigers, Leopards, Zebras, Porcupine, Bo Wart Hog, Fourteen Dromedaries, Mole and Female Elephant, Emus, Nyl Ga Monster Serpents, Living Crocodiles, etc. In all nearly four hundred living specimens. Monster living Alaska Sea Lions, the largest ever captured, and 11

W. W. Cole didn't mention that his train was leased from the railroad in this 1875 newspaper ad. The ad proclaimed that the show's "immensity will admit exhibition only in large towns," which must have made all the small towns on its route proud. Note mention of excursions. Circus World Museum collection.

In order to load we had to remove all the brakes and this the yardmaster refused to do. I showed him my contract, wherein the company had agreed to remove all brakes, so I finally resorted to strategy . . . by the time the yardmaster and I returned [from the restaurant] the train was almost loaded . . . the brakes were easily replaced.

When Coup referred to removing the "brakes" he actually meant the brake-wheels and their vertical stems and supports which rose above the car platform, obstructing the wagon loading path. The Pennsylvania train must have taught Coup this hard lesson. A September 24, 1882 wreck of the Sells brothers circus train was determined by an inquest to have resulted from the removal of the brakewheels from the railroad owned cars by show employees. They had removed the obstructions to facilitate the loading of their wagons on the cars. Only four of the 21 cars in the train had operable brakes.⁷⁴

I determined to have a train of cars built for our special purpose, and accordingly visited all the shops in the East; but I could find no one willing to undertake the job on such short notice. Finally, at Columbus, Ohio, I made the acquaintance of a thorough man of business. He was conducting the car shops there and was prepared to execute any order I might give him.

The decision to build the train was made prior to May 30, the papers at Pittsburgh announcing that \$100,000 was to be spent on a train of "profusely decorated" cars constructed especially for the show.⁷⁵ The J.M. Gill Car Company was the only car building firm in Columbus in 1872, and it executed the Barnum show's order. John L. Gill (1806-1895) founded the firm in 1862 in the remains of a partially burned factory, building it into one of the largest manufacturing concerns in Columbus.⁷⁶ The company continued to build cars until 1885. The only other circus cars known to be Gill products are vehicles built for their hometown showmen, the Sells brothers, in 1879, 1880 and 1882.⁷⁷ In a recent article, Robert Loeffler associated the Improved Stock Car Company with the manufacture of the Barnum cars. This was actually a "paper" firm in which Gill participated. It contracted for a style of palace cars to be built by the Gill firm, but it did not take over the Gill plant nor did it build the Barnum show cars.⁷⁸

The June 10, 1881 Delevan (Wi.) Republican published a list of Coup's significant achievements as a buildup to a June 28 appearance by Coup's own circus at nearby Racine. The one of interest here reads "Coup is the man who, in 1872 organized the first railroad show, and built the first sleeping passenger, box and palace stock car ever owned by any show in the world and in proof refers to Mr. Brill, car builder, Wilmington, Delaware." John G. Brill (1817-1888) was a bonafide railroad car builder who with his oldest son, G. Martin Brill, founded a plant at Philadelphia in 1868.⁷⁹ Brill never had a facility at Wilmington, but



The P.T. Barnum Circus in 1873, location unknown. The show featured a new spread of canvas which included a three pole big top. The tent layout is the same as in the 1872 lot scene, suggesting that management had a preferred arrangement for the tops. The long single file line-up ac-

was renowned for his ability to execute difficult orders, a category into which circus cars fell. By 1880 the Brill firm had definitely built circus cars, but no accounts have been found linking it to either the Barnum or W.C. Coup circuses. The 1872 Barnum show played a six day stand at Philadelphia commencing on April 22, providing ample opportunity for a contact with Brill, who may have eventually furnished some cars to the show. The puzzling part of the Delevan entry is why it would be erroneous after the passage of only 10 years, whereas Coup's memoir wasn't commenced until at least another decade had passed.

In a short time I had made a contract with him, and in thirty days a train of thirty cars was built . . . When our men, as they came into Columbus to exhibit, saw that train awaiting them, they sent up such a shout as has seldom been heard.

The Barnum show played Columbus, Ohio on June 28; with a thirty day delivery, it meant the cars were manufactured at an average rate of one per day, which was feasible considering their simple construction and probable similarity to system flats. The possible order date of May 28 indicates Coup spent less than four weeks conducting his grand tour of the eastern car shops, assuming he started his search after the Baltimore stand.

Two weeks prior to the Barnum show's date, Coup visited Columbus to complete arrangements for the engagement.⁸⁰ Obviously one of his more important duties was to check the progress of his car order at the Gill plant. Following the June 28 appearance at Columbus, two of the local papers reported on the Barnum show's purchase of Gill cars. The June 29 *Ohio*

centuated the size of the show. The Juno parade wagon, visible on the far right, should be compared to the baggage wagon located just above the title banner of the Bunnell Brothers side show. This rare photograph donated by Mike Sporrer to the Circus World Museum.

State Journal reported the show left town using a dozen cars made at the Gill plant. The July 1 *Ohio Statesman* noted John L. Gill delivered 10 cars to Coup, part of an installment of 50. None of the contemporary figures agree with Coup's account, and only conjecture can be used to resolve the discrepancy. It is believed the Gill cars were flat cars, and not stock or box cars.

They [the new Gill cars] were of uniform height, with iron extensions reaching from one to another.

The wording of this passage indicates the crossovers from one car to another were fixed projections at the ends of the cars, unlike the removable crossover plates usually associated with railroad circling. The description resembles the cars which were used on the 1879 Batchellor & Doris circus. During the night of September 1, 1879 a railroad brakeman at Noblesville, Indiana, was killed when his skull was crushed by the projections on the Batchellor & Doris flat cars as he attempted to couple them. The two local papers said the crossovers were called aprons or bridges and indicated they were supported by iron braces projecting from the ends of the car on either side of the bumper, the term used to describe the draw bar face in the link and pin system. From the wording of the account it appears that two opposing, one piece plates spanned the gap, one on either side of the coupler.⁸¹ It is not known if the Batchellor & Doris cars were some of the 1872 Barnum cars or if they were only patterned after them. An 1878 Poge O'Brien train was the basis of the 1879 Batchellor & Doris show, but before taking it on the road, it was sent to Chicago, the site of a U.S. Rolling Stock Co. plant, for repair.

Several sets of modern piggyback cars incorporated a system similar to these cars, with flip down steel plates located on opposite corners of the car. The superior strength of these steel plates eliminated the need for the iron braces incorporated in the 1872-1879 cars.⁸²

I then heard of some palace horse cars at Cleveland. These I bought. I had them freshly painted and lettered, "P.T. Barnum's World's Fair."

Cleveland was played on June 17 and 18. The June 17 *Cleveland (Oh.) Herald* noted that the show purchased two palace stock cars made in Cleveland by the McNairy & Claflin Mfg. Co. They were described as stables on wheels, permitting resting and feeding of the stock while enroute. Since Coup had them "freshly painted," it appears they were purchased second hand.

Now we had Pullman cars for the artists, sleeping cars for the laborers, box cars for the extra stuff, palace cars for the horses and other large animals . . . and platform cars for wagons, chariots, cages and carriages. Thus the Herculean task of putting the first railroad show of any magnitude on its own cars was successfully accomplished.

These two sentences offer a succinct statement of the advances made by Coup and its actual place in circus development.

The Coup-Crissey account terminates at this point, answering some questions and raising many others. Who built the remainder of the train? How many cars were actually built? What was the length of the cars? What methods of loading and unloading were employed? These questions and many others remain to be answered.

The Porter Photograph

It is unfortunate that only one pre-1880 circus photograph, out of the fifty or so which have been examined by researchers, shows a circus train. Because the vehicles were beautiful-

ly painted and would easily stand out in a yard full of ordinary freight cars, it is surprising that no one in the multitudes which watched the activities at the railroad yards took the time to record the scene for posterity. The answer may well lie in the capability of photography of the period, the taking of a photograph in the dark probably being extremely difficult, if not impossible with the cameras then available. Although the area of the train would have been lit by torches, at least one observer noted "there was very little light to see them by, until after the moon rose."⁸³ It is therefore with gratitude that we introduce a piece of work by one 1870's photographer.

On October 24, 1872, Morris H. Porter, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, erected his camera upon the roof of a railroad freight car and recorded for posterity the 1872 Barnum show.⁸⁴ Either by intent in the framing of the exposure, or simply by chance as a result of their position, the right hand side of the view is dominated by a string of nine or ten flat cars and the end of the one high roofed freight car on which the camera was positioned. No mention of Porter's exposure can be found in the Kalamazoo papers, leading to the conclusion he was hired by the show to take the photograph. In support of this conclusion, a group of men can be found posing on what may be a circus vehicle near the center of the photograph, and the circus' later use of the view in advertising materials. The cars are spotted on a side track which paralleled the curved main line of the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad as it jogged to the northwest before heading due north out of Kalamazoo. The site is near the intersection of East Frank and Pitcher Streets, the location of the lot being between that intersection and the North Union school.

The flat cars on the track are all identical, having the same width, height and general construction. The brakewheels, stems and supports, have been removed and can be seen laying on the car platforms. Stake pockets are present along the sides but they hold no stakes or sideboards. The significance of this omission has been diminished by the fact that some of the 1873 Barnum cars deliberately lacked sides.⁸⁵ Also absent are gunwales, chocks, and crossover plates. It is difficult to determine if the ends of the cars are fitted with the "iron extensions" or if the dark area at the end of the car is simply a shadowed end sill. The lack of the usual railroad circus hardware indicates these devices may not have been in use or even conceived at the time of the photo. All of the cars appear to be of relatively recent construction, the roof of the photographer's car unstained by use, the

beds of the flat cars unmarred by the points of chocks or wagon wheels. The adjacent circus lot, the duplicate car construction and the age of the cars all indicate these are some of the cars J.L. Gill built for the Barnum show.

The angle of the view makes an estimation of the car size rather difficult, but a length between twenty and thirty feet would seem reasonable. The side track scales 380 feet long on an 1873 Kalamazoo atlas, which would restrict the length of each of the ten visible cars to a maximum of 38 feet.⁸⁶ Additional spur tracks in the area were available to store the balance of the show train.



Blow up of the 1872 Kalamazoo, Michigan photo. The brakewheels and stems laying on top of the platforms are the strongest proof that these flats were the cars John L. Gill built for the Barnum show. Stake pockets can be seen along each side sill, allowing later retrofitting of sideboards as required. Note two pole big top in background. Albert Conover collection.

Circus Car Construction

A comparison of the Kalamazoo photograph with illustrations of contemporary flat cars suggests that the first circus cars were copies of system cars with a few minor modifications. That this was the case is not unexpected. The closer the circus cars adhered to the basic design of system cars the easier it would have been to keep the cost of the vehicles to a minimum. Changes resulted from the shortcomings in the system cars with which the Barnum show commenced the 1872 season.

Until rolled steel plates and shapes were readily available at competitive prices, the primary materials used in the construction of freight cars was

wood. This abundant and cheap material was used to satisfy both the structural and decorative needs of the car builders. Larger timbers, measuring up to five by twelve inches in cross section, were used to construct the frame, on top of which the car body or platform was built. The connections of the various frame members were usually reinforced by the installation of small iron or steel bars and plates to provide increased rigidity.

The low tensile strength of wood rendered it necessary to implement a design which removed the tensile loads from the wood frame. A composite beam design was adopted, in which the upper section, the wood frame, was placed in compression. The lower section, a series of round longitudinal "truss" rods, was placed in tension. The ends of the truss rods were anchored in the end sills of the wood frame, facilitating the arrangement. The pretensioning of the truss rods placed an upward force on the wood frame via several sets of bearing posts, giving the body of the car an arched shape when viewed from the side.

The simplest form of car is a flat or platform car, defined in the 1870's as "a car, the body of which consists simply of a platform, which is not enclosed on the sides or top."⁸⁷ To build a platform car required only the fastening of crosswise planks on top of the wood frame. These are the type of cars shown in the Kalamazoo photograph, and it is also known the 1873 Barnum train incorporated similar cars. The presence of these cars probably gave rise to the use of the term "flats" to designate both true flat cars and gondolas.

By adding low sideboards to a flat car it became a gondola car.⁸⁸ The sideboards served to confine the car's load within its platform, especially in the case of earthen materials and other loads which could move sideways as a result of normal train motions. In circus use the sideboards provided a curb to keep the wagons on the cars as they were poled along the top of the train. If the chocks became loose or dislodged, the sideboards served as a secondary retainer to keep the wagon on the car. Most sideboards were installed using a series of stake pockets affixed to the outside sills of the cars. Gondola cars were present in both the 1872 and 1873 Barnum trains.⁸⁹

The abuse incurred by the planks resulted in the installation of sacrificial longitudinal boards the length of the car near the outer edges. Showmen called these boards gunnels, a variation of the nautical term gunwales, defined as the uppermost planking on the top edge of a ship's side.⁹⁰ The gunnels took the abuse from the points of chocks and wagon wheel rims and required periodic replacement.

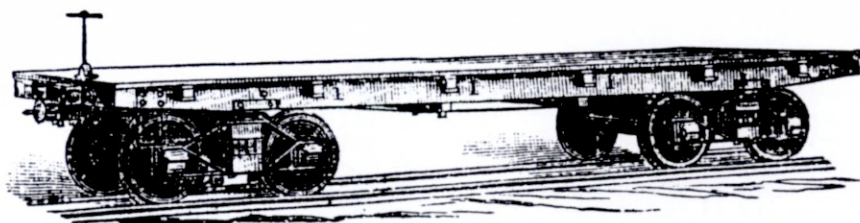
Stock cars were constructed on the same basic principle as flat cars except that they lacked the low sides, having a complete body built upon the platform, with internal facilities suitable for the housing of animals. The sides were normally constructed with framing adapted from the Howe or Pratt bridge truss. The side framing arrangement would vary with the builder, being an extension of the design used on their conventional stock cars for the railroads. At least one example, on the John B. Doris circus in the mid 1880's, did not employ a bridge truss arrangement, utilizing only the vertical members without the diagonal reinforcing bracing.⁹¹ Nameboards were affixed either at the roofline or slightly below it, usually extending the length of the car.

The flat cars, gondolas and stock cars used by circuses all had corresponding equivalents in system cars, but it is not known which type of car served as a pattern for the first elephant cars. Based upon later elephant cars' similarity to a c.1879 illustration, it is believed they followed the design of cars used to transport horses. Similar to stock cars, these vehicles had external wood sheathing on the outside and only a minimum number of exterior vents to prevent too much outside air from entering the cars.

Except for the industry leaders, few circus proprietors could afford to continually update their railroad equipment and incorporate the technical improvements which were being adopted by the system railroads. The selling of used cars from show to show extended the life of cars which were technologically obsolescent. The older equipment no doubt added to the railroads' reluctance to handle show trains. Circus hauling contracts generally gave the railroad the privilege of inspecting the cars to assure that they satisfied minimum safety standards. It is suspected that some showmen were ultimately forced to buy new cars or to retrofit them after the railroads flatly refused to handle their trains.

Two major improvements in railroad hardware developed during the second half of the nineteenth century were automatic couplers and air brakes. The first circus cars to be fitted with these devices were the advance cars, as they had to interchange with system passenger cars.

Link and pin couplers were used on early circus trains, the operation of the device being an exceptional occupational hazard to railroad men. With the advent of the automatic coupler and its acceptance by the railroads, circus proprietors were required to implement it in order to have their train equipment handled by system locomotives. During the period of transition several types of couplers were



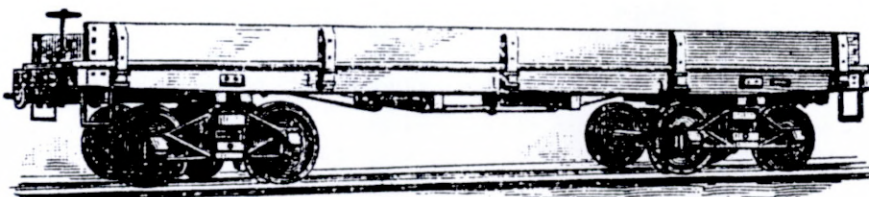
A true flat car had no sideboards to retain loads. The flat cars in the 1872 Kalamazoo photo resemble this flat car found in Matthias Forney's 1879 *Dictionary*. Note the unfilled stake pockets along the outside sill.

apparently available that could be used with either link and pin or knuckle couplers.

In 1878 the Howes show traveled on leased cars which were fitted with Miller couplings. This was an early form of automatic coupler, consisting of two opposing spring loaded hooks. The 1882 advance car built by Gill for the Sells show carried the same couplers.⁹² Cars built for the 1880 Great London Show incorporated link and pin couplers. The 1881 W.W. Cole train was fitted with Potter drawbars, a patented link and pin arrangement incorporating three links.⁹³ By 1892 the Barnum & Bailey show train was equipped with Robert Eastwick automatic couplers.⁹⁴

Manual brakes were the standard means of retarding car motion when circus trains first came into use. Coup mentions them in his memoir, and cites an incident where he was made aware of the improvements air brakes offered.⁹⁵ The 1878 Howes advance car was said to be equipped with improved Westinghouse brakes, the same type as installed on the new Sells advertising car in 1882 and the advance car James E. Cooper offered for sale in 1883.⁹⁶ The first circus freight cars which were equipped with air brakes may have been the 1881

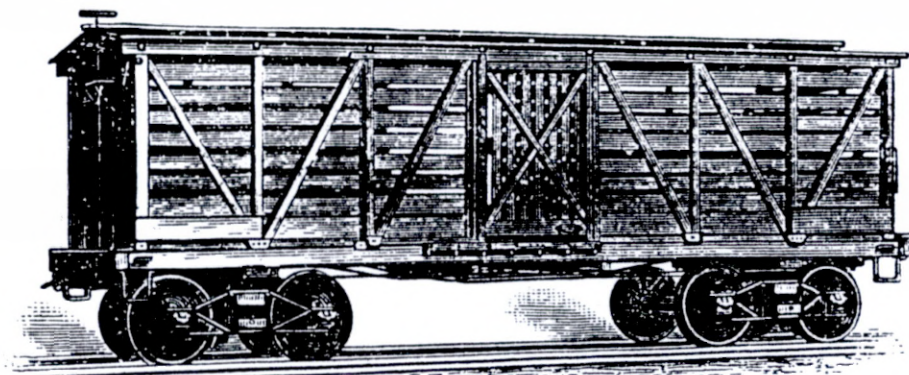
Circus flats were called gondolas by railroad men of the 1870's. This 1879 engraving shows a typical gondola which would have been similar to those used on circuses of the period, in lengths of twenty to forty feet.



vehicles built for W.W. Cole. When the cars were sold in 1886 they were equipped with Westinghouse air brakes. The leased cars used by Sells in 1882 were still equipped with manual brakes.⁹⁷ By 1886 the railroads began a concerted effort to force all circus proprietors to equip their cars with air brakes. One record of this intention is an 1886 letter to R.E. Sheeran from the Commissioner of the Western Freight Association advising that the group had passed a resolution advocating their adoption.⁹⁸ Air brakes with double safety chains were standard equipment on the 1892 Barnum & Bailey train.

From 1872 to 1879 the Barnum show never ventured farther south than Virginia in the east or Missouri in the midwest. By avoiding the southern states it was not necessary to equip the train cars for broad gauge operation. The Civil War had demonstrated the need for a single national gauge and as the philosophy became implemented one of the major limitations to circus train travel gradually receded.

Shows which did play southern dates accommodated the gauge changes in different ways. Forepaugh had an advance car built in 1877 which had adjustable trucks to accommodate all rail gauges.⁹⁹ A car with similar features was offered for sale by James E. Cooper in 1883.¹⁰⁰ In 1875 the Howes Great London sent their 40 leased cars to the Ohio Falls Car Works in Jeffersonville, Indiana to have the trucks' gauge changed for the southern railroads.¹⁰¹ The Sells show conducted a similar exercise in 1883, when they went south on the broad gauge Southern Railroad out of Cincinnati. Jake Posey indicated the wheels were simply pressed into new locations on the axles.¹⁰²



Car Length

An observer outside the circus business noted that during the two decades preceeding 1887 the industry leaders had switched from traveling on wagons to twenty foot rail cars, later adopting cars twice that length.¹⁰³ The twenty foot cars were second rate system cars by the early 1870's when thirty foot cars began to predominate.

Railroad car length is the result of several factors, including the shipper's needs, the strength of available materials, road bed stability, car design expertise, and allowable wheel loads. The density of circus loads was adequately low to permit a subsequent stretching of the standard car length within the conventional wood frame design without overstressing the components. The driving force behind the extension was the railroads' method of determining the charges for moving the circus. Instead of using the normal ton mile rates as it did for moving regular loads in system cars, the railroads charged circuses according

Cattle cars of the 1870's provided no comforts for their inhabitants. This 1879 example, measuring about 30 feet long, is similar to those which most circuses leased.

to the number of cars in their trains. The purchase of longer cars was later referred to as "a shrewd move on the part of the circus folks to beat the railroads." The 1891 article from which this quote was lifted also provides the earliest confirmation of the use of the car-mile rate structure, although it certainly was in force years before.¹⁰⁴

The length of palace stock cars was the result of their internal construction. The stalls, feeding arrangements and other internal conveniences for the well being of the beasts decreased the number of animals which could be

The builders of the earliest elephant cars may have constructed them similar to horse cars, which had sheathed sides and allowed only a minimum of ventilation to reach the valuable beasts inside.

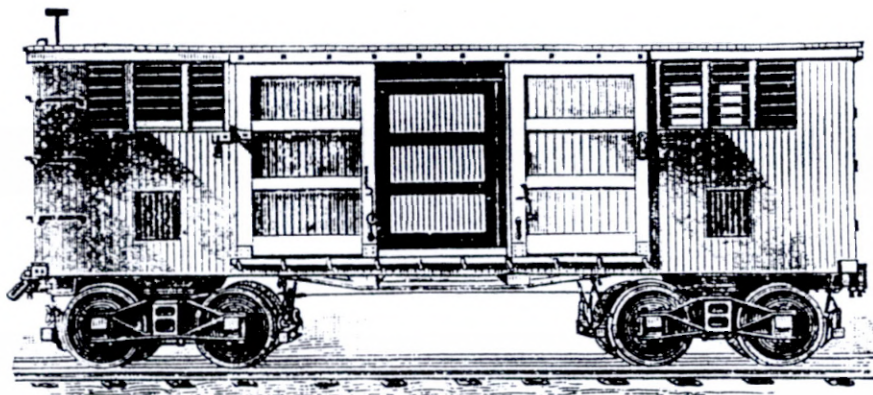
loaded in a palace stock car of standard length, as compared to an ordinary stock car which did not provide for the separation of animals. As a result, the palace car operators caused the builders of palace stock cars to adopt longer lengths to equalize the animals per car ratio with the simpler pen type cars. The early acquisition of long palace cars may have provided an additional impetus to consider longer cars for the remainder of the train.

Three post-Columbus, Ohio newspaper accounts of the 1872 Barnum train size have been found. The earliest, the July 1, 1872 Springfield (Oh.) *Daily Republic*, puts it on 44 cars. The latest, the October 24, 1872 Kalamazoo (Mi.) *Daily Gazette*, puts it on 47. Another, the July 13, 1872 Dayton (Oh.) *Journal*, puts it on 62 cars, a number which is believed to revert to the total prior to the receipt of the new cars, which took place on, or soon after, June 28. The train was intended to travel in two sections, but it is possible that various railroads split it into three or four sections. The counting of the cars in only three of the four sections could have resulted in the 44 and 47 car reports, but it is hard to believe the same oversight would be made twice. Assuming that Coup's figure of thirty new cars is correct, the "new" train included only 14 or 17 of the original leased cars. Deducting these 14 or 17 cars from the original 61 implies that the 30 new cars equalled 47 or 44 of the leased cars. This would make the new cars half again as long as the leased cars.

Circus Train Costs

Circus proprietors of the nineteenth century freely distributed information concerning the alleged cost of putting their shows before the public. Unfortunately for historians trying to reconstruct a circus' true finances, these figures were commonly inflated, often by one or two orders of magnitude, making them unreliable. The cost of purchasing and outfitting a train was seldom remarked upon, perhaps because the inflated publicity figures could be readily disproven by simple inquiries directed to the railroads or car builders. This may explain the dearth of information concerning circus railroad car costs. What follows is a resume of the information which is currently available.

The earliest circus train for which a cost has been found is the 1877 Forepaugh train. This string of thirty cars, of which the freight cars measured forty feet long, reportedly cost \$40,000, or an average of \$1,333 for each car. This average is weighted by the two sleepers and an advance car in the consist, so a truer average cost may be a hundred dollars less per car.¹⁰⁵ When the Ringlings acquired



part of their first train from Forepaugh in late 1889, some of these same forty foot cars may have been included in their purchase. At that time their value was established at \$350 to \$400 each.¹⁰⁶

Continuing into the 1880's, the twenty-two car train of 50 and 60 foot cars acquired by Burr Robbins in 1884 cost a reported \$25,000.¹⁰⁷ The average car cost of \$1137 is reasonably close to the earlier Forepaugh figures. It is interesting to note that although some of the Robbins cars were half again as long as the Forepaugh cars, their price was not proportionately higher. Presumably the cost of building the longer cars was offset by improved methods of manufacturing.

In his memoir, Coup quoted car prices from an invoice book which was in his possession. The car quantities he set forth suggest that the prices applied to his own circus of 1878-1882, rather than the Barnum show of 1872-1875. His figures were as follows:

2 Advertising Cars	\$5,000
2 Sleepers	5,000
10 Flat Cars at \$400	4,000
6 Horse cars at \$400	2,400
1 Elephant Car	500

It is also suspected that these figures represent the price of second hand cars. There are no reports of Coup purchasing new cars until 1881, when he acquired two fifty foot flats.¹⁰⁸ More importantly, the costs are about half the price of both the new Forepaugh and Robbins cars, while being equal to the prices Ringlings paid for second hand forty and fifty foot cars in 1889.¹⁰⁹ When the Coup show was auctioned at Detroit on September 18, 1882, the cars brought prices ranging from \$230 to \$325 each. The bids received on one 50 foot flat were only one third to one fourth of the thousand dollars which Coup specified as the original cost of the car to one reporter.¹¹⁰

To find irrefutable car prices which are stipulated in contracts between a circus and car builder one must go beyond the 1897 end date imposed upon this monograph. The earliest known contracts for circus cars cover purchases made by the Ringlings from Barney & Smith for the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells and 1914 Ringling circuses. The two flats and four stocks for Forepaugh-Sells, measuring sixty feet long, respectively cost \$1,100 and \$1,340 each in March 1910. The Ringling cars were of similar construction and size, but supplied at a slightly higher price. The Ringling show's eleven flats cost \$1,175 each and the ten stocks were priced at \$1,400 apiece.¹¹¹ New sixty foot wood flats still cost between \$1,000 and \$1,450 each as late as 1920 to 1921.¹¹²

If the above information is representative, as we believe it to be, an estimate can be made of the cost of the

By September 1872 the Barnum circus claimed it toured on three trains of forty cars each, an exaggeration. This was the first season the famous slogan "The Greatest Show on Earth" was used. Circus World Museum collection.

1872 Barnum train. Viewed from early 1872, the show was undertaking the replacement of about 65 system cars, possibly consisting of 60 freight cars and five sleepers. Using \$1,200 as the average cost of a stock or flat and \$2,500 as the cost of a sleeper, the total price would have been \$84,500. Adding in some money for ancillary equipment and a few dollars for contingency, Barnum's \$100,000 figure looks like it was an honest estimate. The accuracy of his figure increases if it is determined that car prices fell between 1872 and 1877, the date of our earliest costs. The possibility that the show purchased a smaller number of longer cars does not necessarily mean the cost would have been less, as the overall length of the train remained essentially the same.

The cost of the 1872 Barnum train approached the cost of framing the overland show in 1871, testifying to the level of financial commitment necessary to put a large circus on its

own train.¹¹³ It was the financial success of the 1871 enterprise which enabled the Barnum show to buy its own train in 1872. Other circus men leased trains before and after the Barnum show's purchase, but Adam Forepaugh did not embark on rails until he acquired his own train in 1877. The reason for the delay in adopting rail travel is not readily apparent, as Forepaugh could have leased a train, as other showmen did, between 1873 and 1876. Perhaps he was not an advocate of the big rail show approach, having moved his show by leased train on occasion. Another possibility is that Forepaugh avoided rail travel until he could afford to purchase his own string of cars, wishing to avoid derisive remarks from the Barnum show concerning the competition's leased train. By comparison, W.W. Cole spent the better part of 1874 to 1880 traveling by leased train, suggesting that most showmen could simply not afford the price of their own train until after accumulating profits for several seasons. The years following 1872 were poor ones for the circus industry, caused by the economic conditions resulting from the Panic of 1873. A dearth of profits undoubtedly added to the difficulty showmen faced when they attempted to purchase a train.

The capital necessary to acquire a train was rivaled only by the capital cost of building a very extensive and unusually exotic menagerie. There is a significant functional difference between these two expenditures which must be noted. The menagerie is an income generator, the publicizing of its variety and rarities contributing to the attraction of larger audiences. The train was strictly an expense item which did not generate cash. For the largest circuses, the train was an absolute necessity, for it enabled them to conduct their business in the only feasible manner.

Footnotes

46. *Clipper*, April 13, 1872, p. 12.
47. Platform car is defined in Edward H. Knight, *Knight's American Mechanical Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1876), Vol. II, p. 1740. The earliest continuous circus use of flat cars has not been definitely established. L.B. Lent may have used one in 1866, and an unidentified menagerie used two to carry four cages in 1867. See Toledo (Oh.) *Blade*, December 5, 1867.
48. *Clipper*, August 19, 1871, p. 159.
49. loc. cit.
50. Quoted in the Jackson (Mi.) *Daily Citizen*, October 24, 1872.
51. See "Moving a Great Circus; Brain Work of the Railroad Contractor," *New York Times*, January 6, 1889.
52. Barnum's career as a circus impresario is covered in Neil Harris, *Humbly: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973) and Arthur H. Saxon, editor, *Selected Letters of P.T. Barnum* (New York: Columbia University, 1983), hereafter cited as Saxon, *Letters*.
53. Indianapolis (In.) *News*, July 29, 1873.
54. Lafayette (In.) *Daily Journal*, October 26, 1872.

55. Jackson (Mi.) *Daily Citizen*, October 26, 1872.
56. Jackson (Mi.) *Daily Citizen*, September 18, 1874.
57. Louis E. Cooke, "Reminiscences of a Showman," Newark (N.J.) *Evening Star*, August 19, 1915.
58. These figures are from an excursion prospectus which Barnum & Bailey distributed to railroad men in 1889. Pfening Archives.
59. Cleveland (Oh.) *Herald*, December 22, 1875. The 1872 profit is given as "several hundred thousand dollars," but 1873 reportedly yielded close to \$750,000.
60. Delevan (Wi.) *Republican*, March 9, 1871.
61. Stuart Thayer, "Prelude to Barnum: the Coup and Castello Circus of 1870," *Bandwagon*, XV, 4, pp. 18-20.
62. *Clipper*, August 19, 1871, p. 159.
63. C. Fred Crosby, "The Early Days of Barnum's 'Greatest Show on Earth,'" *Billboard*, January 21, 1922, pp. 49, 69.
64. The scope of the 1872 show can be visualized by reviewing an account of the 1871 show. See Stuart Thayer, "P.T. Barnum's Great Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan and Hippodrome, the Season of 1871," *Bandwagon*, XX, 4, pp. 4-9. The show's own description of its 1872 features can be found in the *New York Mercury*, March 24, 1872.
65. The preparation of the Coup articles was a minor assignment in the career of Crissey (1864-1943), who is best known as an institutional biographer. See Julia M. Ehresman, ed., *Geneva, Illinois: A History of Its Times and Places* (Geneva: Geneva Public Library, 1977), pp. 309-310. Crissey had numerous books and articles to his credit, and was sufficiently well known to appear in *Who's Who in America* as early as 1920. Born in New York, Crissey moved to Chicago in 1893, where he executed the Coup pieces.
66. *Saturday Evening Post*, 172, 21 (November 18, 1899), p. 408. While old showmen's memoirs generally attempt to give a faithful account of history, the accuracy of these reminiscences are subject to the distortion caused by the passage of years from event to recollection.
67. *Billboard*, August 19, 1922, p. 63, contained this excerpt, lifted from a program then in the possession of Coup's brother.
68. Detroit (Mi.) *News*, August 30, 1882.
69. Unidentified clipping, Circus World Museum.
70. *Twenty Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to the Stockholders*, March 11, 1873 (Philadelphia: E.C. Markley & Son, 1873), p. 27.
71. *Billboard*, February 17, 1917, p. 51, italics added; also see *Clipper*, June 29, 1889, p. 257 for a portrait of McLean. Coup identified the show's 1872 boss canvasser as a man named Baker, and Joseph Baker is listed as the show's master of pavilions in the March 24, 1872 *New York Mercury*.
72. Saxon, *Letters*, pp. 169-170.
73. Cleveland (Oh.) *Daily Herald*, June 15, 1872, quoting the Titusville, (Pa.) *Courier*.
74. *Ohio State Journal*, September 27, 1882; *Clipper*, October 7, 1882, p. 479.
75. *Pittsburgh (Pa.) Evening Chronicle*, May 30, 1872.
76. Jacob H. Studer, *Columbus, Ohio: Its History, Resources and Progress* (n.p.: 1873), p. 569; William Alexander Taylor, *Centennial History of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1909), Vol. II, pp. 813-816.
77. 1879 Sells Bros. Route Book; *Ohio State Journal*, March 8, 1880; *National Car Builder*, XIII, 5 (May 1882), p. 51.
78. Robert Loeffler, "Circus Wagons On Train Cars in 1872 Subject of Lengthy Review of Season," *White Tops*, LVI, 3 (May-June 1983), pp. 35-43. Although Loeffler presented a considerable amount of new data, the author does not agree with several of his major conclusions. See the *Ohio State Journal*, June 10 and 13, 1872 for articles concerning the relationship between Gill and the Improved Stock Car Co.
79. James Rawle, "A History of the J.G. Brill Company," *Brill Magazine*, 1911, pp. 25-28,

- 58-60; *Manufactories and Manufacturers of Pennsylvania*, 1875, p. 72.
80. *Ohio State Journal*, June 19, 1872.
81. Noblesville (In.) *Ledger*, September 5, 1879; Noblesville *Independent*, September 6, 1879.
82. A photograph of such a car can be seen in Loeffler, p. 43.
83. Worcester (Ma.) *Evening Gazette*, May 26, 1880. The 1875 Barnum sale booklet lists "Torches for big top and Railroads."
84. The original print is labeled 'P.T. Barnum's Great Show, M.H. Porter, Kalamazoo, Mich.' An engraving from the photograph was used in Barnum show and Howes Great London advertising materials in the mid 1870's with both the site and date given.
85. Lafayette (In.) *Daily Journal*, July 31, 1873.
86. *Atlas of Kalamazoo County, Michigan*. (New York: F.W. Beers & Co., 1873).
87. Matthias N. Forney, *The Railroad Car Builder's Dictionary*, (1879; rpt. New York: Dover, 1974), p. 74. Also see Knight, loc. cit.
88. Forney, p. 80, defines gondola car as "A car with a platform-body which is enclosed with low side-boards." The sideboards could be

hinged or removeable, and were much shorter than the sides of cars which are called gondolas today.

89. loc. cit.
90. Sir James Murray, *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), IV, pp. 514-151; also see Knight, II, p. 1043.
91. The cars appear in the background of a series of stereo slides taken between 1883 and 1887. Circus World Museum.
92. Specified in an 1878 railroad contract form of the Howes circus at the Circus World Museum; loc. cit; This coupler is described and illustrated in Forney, pp. 105, 361.
93. *Clipper*, November 20, 1886, p. 576.
94. Noted on an 1892 Barnum & Bailey letterhead in the Pfening Archives.
95. *Post*, p. 949. Coup noted the episode originated at Indiana, Pennsylvania, a site not on the Barnum routes during his tenure as manager. Perhaps the runaway occurred on Coup's own show of 1878-1882.
96. *Clipper*, March 31, 1883, p. 30.
97. loc. cit.
98. The letter is reprinted in *Bannerline*, August 1, 1979, p. 12.
99. Clipping dated June 28, 1877 from a Clinton, (Wi.) paper. Circus World Museum.
100. loc. cit.
101. Louisville (Ky.) *Courier Journal*, September 2, 1875.
102. *Last of the Forty Horse Drivers* (New York: Vantage Press, 1959), p. 21; additional information on the techniques used to accommodate gauge changes can be found in Taylor and Neu's *The American Railroad Network*.
103. *New York Times*, October 23, 1887.
104. "How A Circus Is Moved About The Country," *Good News*, July 25, 1891, pp. 1019-1020.
105. *Clipper*, February 1, 1890, p. 774.
106. See Richard E. Conover, "The Early Ringling Railer," *Bandwagon*, XI, 2, pp. 4-8.
107. C.P. Fox and Ralph Hartman, "The Burr Robbins Circus," *Bandwagon*, XIII, 6, p. 11.
108. Forrest Crissey, Editor, "With The Big Show," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 12, 1900, p. 1057. According to a lawsuit filed by Coup after an 1882 wreck, his train consisted of 2 advertising cars, 3 passenger coaches, 12 flats, 6 stocks, 1 elephant car and 1 baggage car. These were supplemented by one stock and one flat car supplied by the railroad on which it was traveling. See Coup vs. Wabaah, St. L. & P. Railway Co., 56 Michigan III.
109. Elsewhere in his text Coup quotes the price of flat and stock cars as between \$500 and \$800, which may reflect the price of some new cars.
110. Detroit (Mi.) *Free Press*, September 19, 1882.
111. Richard E. Conover notes from the Sverre O. Braathen collection, courtesy Albert Conover; the 1914 contracts are in the collection of Fred D. Pfening III.
112. December 1921 Horne Zoological Arena Co. ad reproduced in Loeffler, p. 40; *Billboard*, January 31, 1920, p. 78.
113. For comparison, the value of the 1873 Forepaugh circus was \$77,950, determined as a result of the show being destroyed in winter quarters on December 20, 1873. The Forepaugh show was probably Barnum's biggest competitor, possessing a large and varied menagerie. See Richard E. Conover, *The Great Forepaugh Show*, 1959, p. 5.

PHOTO CORRECTION

The photo at the top of page 46 of the November-December 1983 *Bandwagon* is identified as Robbins Bros. Circus in 1930 or 1931. This photo is the Christy Bros. Circus train in the rail yards of Newport, R.I., on August 3, 1927. Ed Tracy, of Middletown, R.I., now has the negatives of photos taken by John Cutler. Cutler took the Christy photo as well as photos of Robbins in Newport in 1931. Mr. Tracy has properly identified the photo as the Christy train.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 1878.

FOUR GREAT SHOWS IN ONE DAY!

FIRST—**HOWE'S GREAT LONDON SHOW!**
SECOND—**SANCER'S BRITISH MENAGERIE!**
THIRD—**DOCKRILL'S PARISIAN CIRCUS!**
FOURTH—**THE MADRID, SPAIN, MARDI-GRAS AND NEW ORLEANS CARNIVAL!**

COMING ON THREE SPECIAL TRAINS OF CARS OWNED BY THE MANAGERS OF THE FOUR GREAT SHOWS. ONE TICKET ADMITS TO ALL.

FT. SCOTT, Tuesday, June 16.

AND UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL THEY EVER DIVIDE.

(One expedition and multiplied combination of nearly all that is grand, great and new in the Animal, Equine, Circus and Menagerie World.)

ROYAL TALLY HO COACH.



Purchased from an English Duke, with twelve leaders and guards, costumed in livery, at a cost of \$10,000. The only carriage in America to be so fitted. Horses, and a third of a mile of track.

ROYAL PLEASURE LIFE IN THE MOTHER COUNTRY.

And it is strong contrasts with our own familiar means of stagecoach travel.

QUARTETTE OF THE MOST FAMOUS RIDERS LIVING:

MILLIE ELISE DOCKRILL, Whose speed on Footstep, Fast Horse and Hurdle Rides were noted, and this is the only Woman who has won four times of our time.	JAMES ROBINSON, Winning the title of France, Spain, Russia and England, and the mastery of his country. First up pressure after a jump, around the world, and no other of our countrymen have done his extraordinary feat in the history of all countries.
MILLIE PAULINE LEE, Whose elegant and graceful Footstep, and Jockeying qualifications have excited a fervor throughout Europe.	WILLIAM GORMAN, The Wizard Showman and Horseman Hurdle and Jockey Rider.

LEAP AND DOUBLE SOMERSAULT OF THIRTY-EIGHT FEET.
By the great eight Athlete on Earth, Mr. Frank Gardner, Australian Leaper.

R. H. DOCKRILL'S MENAGE ACT.
With his trained horse "Elegance," and the Celebrated Stand of T. T. Mackervision Horses. The following scene, in a field of cultivation, is a most novel and rare.

GROUP OF FIVE ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS!
Trained and performed by the English expert, Alfred Hill. Recently three times as many as were owned by any other show, and the only performing Wild Beasts of their kind in America.

LAIR OF EIGHT GRAVE-ROBBING HYPENAS
Hunted in open day in the desert of the Sahara.

FIVE ELEPHANTS IN PYRAMID.



Contrary to their advertising, the Howes Great London Circus traveled on a leased train in 1878. Nevertheless, the ad conveys the status conferred by ownership of rail equipment. The June 16 date on this ad is a typographical error; the show actually played Fort Scott, Kansas on July 16, 1878. Pfening Archives.

"YOU OTTO C. FLOTO"

The Otto Floto Shows in Kansas

Part IV

The Sells-Floto Shows

Season of 1906

by Orin C. King



William 'Willie' Sells the renegade nephew of the famous Sells Brothers. Pfening Archives.

Willie, Billy, William Allen Sells; Willie in Topeka, Billy out on the road, and William Sells in court was the adopted son of William Allen and Sarah Ann White Sells. The father was a partner in the famous Sells Brothers Circus, and when he sold out to his brothers in 1882 he moved to Topeka, Kansas, and immediately became a leading capitalist in the development of the city. Allen prospered, and on his death, March 19, 1894, Sarah Ann became the wealthiest woman in Kansas. Willie was not mentioned in the will of Allen, and the entire estate, estimated at \$300,000, passed to his widow.

On May 9, 1895, Sarah Ann Sells married Simon Greenspan, a man young enough to be her son, a former employee of Willie's, and a frequent carousing companion of his now stepson. Willie was furious and said many harsh things to the newly-weds. The result was that Sarah Ann wrote a new will completely bypassing Willie.

Sarah Ann was not long in regretting her marriage. At one point, being completely disgusted with Simon's insane schemes and money squandering, Sarah Ann offered a reward of \$1,000 to anyone who could provide her with sufficient evidence for a divorce. Simon died in a Leavenworth, Kansas, mental hospital September

26, 1900, before the money could be claimed.

Free at last, Sarah Ann Sells-Greenspan went to court to be relieved of Simon's name. A reconciliation with Willie soon followed and Sarah Ann told Willie and numerous other persons that she intended writing a new will leaving everything to her son. Before any action was taken on the writing of the new will, Sarah Ann Sells died unexpectedly of a heart attack, April 25, 1901. The undertaker had great difficulty in removing the body of the 5'10", 300 pound woman from her upstairs bedroom.

The will of Sarah Ann provided that several valuable pieces of Topeka real estate, plus a farm of 320 acres near Tecumseh, Kansas, should be held in trust until her grandson, Allen, born March 22, 1892, reached the age of twenty-five. In the event of Allen's death his share of the estate would go to the Topeka Orphans' Home. The biggest flaw in this arrangement was that on May 17, 1901, Willie was appointed guardian for his son. The balance of the estate, except for a few minor bequests, was to go to the sisters of Sarah Ann.

In an action begun January 2, 1902 (Case 21542, District Court of Shawnee County, Kansas), Willie sought to recover diamonds he had given his

mother. On January 22, 1902, Willie filed suit to break his mother's will (Case 21543, District Court of Shawnee County). Suffice it to say that the cases dragged on through the lower courts until reaching the Supreme Court of Kansas. While the case was pending, a settlement was reached out of court and on December 19, 1904, Willie inherited real estate valued at \$87,000 and diamonds worth \$3,700. The day following the award, Willie acting as guardian for his son, sold the Tecumseh farm of 320 acres, appraised at \$8,000 for \$6,400.

One of Willie's first actions after becoming wealthy, was to attend the auction of the Forepaugh-Sells show. The *Topeka State Journal*, January 12, 1905, reported that Willie and some unnamed associates were prepared to bid \$125,000. The first bid was that of James A. Bailey for \$150,000. Bailey immediately sold a half interest to the Ringling brothers.

Willie's next move was the sale of his interest in the Sells & Downs show to his partners, Martin Downs and John Durham (Durham in court records) for an undisclosed amount in February, 1905. The story in the *Topeka State Journal*, February 3, 1905, announcing the sale of Sells & Downs contained the amusing statement that, "Sells has acquired an interest in the Sells-Forepaugh show, which was recently sold at Columbus, O., to James

Band chariot on the Great Syndicate Show and Paris Hippodrome in 1894. The bandwagon was on the Batcheller and Doris Circus in the 1880s. The Great Syn-

dicate title was used by Sells and Rentfrow as a dodge in cities burned up by the original title. The bandwagon was later sold to Campbell Bros. Pfening Archives.



A. Bailey, and will manage the show this season."

The amusement stems from the night of October 4, 1890, when Willie attached the Barnum & Bailey center pole wagon, the tent poles and eight gray horses with harness while on the way to the runs in an attempt to collect \$1,110 which Willie claimed was due him for his work with the show in London, 1889. In answer to Willie's suit, A.B. Campbell, attorney for the show, claimed that Willie was dissipated and negligent of his duties during the entire engagement and was absent for 13 of the performances. Unfortunately, the outcome is unknown for pages are missing from the file, but nevertheless it is ridiculous to think that after all the trouble Willie caused that Bailey would give him a job of any kind. (Case 12062, District Court of Shawnee, Kansas).

The *Topeka Daily Herald*, June 24, 1905, reprinted from an unidentified "amusement publication" a letter written by Willie from Humble, Texas, June 17 as follow: "Humble, Tex., is the greatest oil field in the world. The camp is only six months old, and there are over 8,000 people here now. I have some fine property here, and will send you a picture of my first oil well. I have made more money since I have been in this field, the last three months, than I have in all my life before in the circus business. The picture I am mailing you of my well is one of a well that is producing 16,000 barrels of oil per day."

Despite the great wealth accrued from his Texas sheikdom, Willie was back in Topeka by July 14, 1905, announcing elaborate plans to remodel and add a fourth floor to the Chesterfield hotel which had been constructed by Allen Sells and acquired by Willie when he broke his mother's will.

The next report on Willie appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1904. According to the *Tribune*, Willie had been sharing an apartment at 23 Douglas Place in Chicago under the name of Williams with a musical comedy actress, Blanche Homan. On the evening of August 11, Homan was visited by another admirer, George B. Walker, a salesman for the Shaw-Walker office equipment company. Witnesses reported that Willie came running into the building in his shirt sleeves with a revolver in his hand. When Homan put her arm around Walker, Willie lost control and gave the man a severe pistol whipping, fracturing his skull. Walker managed to walk to a nearby police station and was taken to Wesley Hospital. Willie moved out of the apartment the next day and left Chicago on the 23rd when he learned that Walker was out of danger. On the 19th Walker's attorney announced that a suit for \$25,000 would be filed against Willie. Willie



Willie Sells, the boy rider, appeared with the Sells Bros. Circus. This litho featuring Sells and William Showles was printed by the Strobridge firm. Circus World Museum Collection.

denied everything. Thanks to the deplorable record keeping in Chicago and the "go away, boy, you bother me" attitude of the persons in charge, we may never learn the outcome.

While Willie was enjoying the sophisticated life in Chicago, a suit filed July 19, 1905, in the District Court of Shawnee County (Case 23387) came to trial on August 18. Edward P. Hatch, doing business as Lord and Taylor, New York City vs. William Sells for the collection of a debt incurred by Willie for merchandise valued at \$245.80 in December, 1896, with interest at 6½ percent. The case was delayed as long as possible but on March 6, 1906, an attachment for \$452.68 was issued against Willie on real estate and personal property. The interesting thing about this case is that the sheriff could not find anything in Kansas that belonged to William Sells. This is even more of a puzzle when one considers the case of Bailey vs. Sells.

A suit was filed July 23, 1905, (Case 234002, District Court of Shawnee County) by Joseph H. Bailey for recovery on Willie's note of \$2,600 with interest at six percent, dated January 2, 1897. Bailey had made many attempts to collect on the note but had not received one cent. Willie replied to Bailey's demands with letters written over the years.

In 1899, Willie was broke.

March 15, 1900, Willie was broke.

August 26, 1901, Willie was broke.

July 21, 1902, Willie was broke.

May 12, 1903, Willie was broke.

December 20, 1903, Willie was sick and broke.

January 11, 1904, Willie was broke.

Willie got his inheritance in December, 1904, but paid nothing on this debt. On March 2, 1906, an attachment was made on the real and personal property of William Sells. The next move surprised everyone.

A motion to dissolve attachment was filed March 15, 1906, by H.H. Tammen. In his motion Tammen stated that on December 28, 1905, he had purchased from Willie all of the real estate owned by Willie and his wife in Shawnee County. In an affidavit accompanying the motion Tammen declared that the purchase was in good faith and for a full consideration and that he did not know that there was any action pending against Willie. Tammen further declared that the property had been resold by his attorney, Eugene Hagan, Topeka.

Willie's attorney, Eugene Hagan, filed an answer to the plaintiff's charges citing the statute of limitations, and stating that the sum of \$2,600 was not a loan but an investment in a show that Willie was organizing and that the show failed with a loss of \$7,568, half of which should be borne by the plaintiff and asked the court to award Willie \$3,784. The case was dismissed April 4, 1906.

The *Topeka State Journal*, September 6, 1905, carried an interview with Willie in which he stated that he had purchased the William P. Hall show and that he would put a brand new circus in the field next spring under the title of "The Great William Sells Shows." The show would move on 34 cars and winter in Topeka.

"Willie Sells, familiarly known to the profession as 'Billy' Sells, is now the only member of the famous circus family in the business and is the sole owner of the Sells circus. Mr. Sells had been looking toward Colorado with its climate as a suitable place for wintering. Last week he reached the city and here he found the Floto shows all settled in splendid quarters and in possession of the strategic point of the

Willie's career as a circus owner was anything but laudable. His first show, Sells & Andress, was sold by the sher-

Willie was back in business in 1900 as a partner in Sells & Gray. Sells & Gray was sold at auction by the sheriff in Algiers, Louisiana, on January 7, 1902, to satisfy a debt to the Donaldson Lithographing Company of Newport, Kentucky. William M. Donaldson bought the property for \$5,025.



and immediately resold it to Willie and his new partner, M.J. Downs.

Joseph Anderson on November 28, 1903, filed suit against Willie as a partner in Sells & Gray United Shows to recover \$400 he lost to Willie in a card game when the show played Starkville, Mississippi, on October 21, 1901. (Case 22476, District Court of Shawnee County). In answer to the plaintiff's petition Willie, through his lawyer, Eugene Hagan, replied "defendant denies that he was on the 21st of October 1901 a partner of James Gray, or had any interest in the said partnership of Sells & Gray, or was in any way connected with the said Sells & Gray circus as a partner therein or ever had any partnership interest in said circus or the said firm of Sells & Gray." Willie was right. He owned no part of the Sells & Gray show. But his wife did. The case was dropped.

One last instance of Willie's financial scheming will suffice. In his money dealings Willie showed an amazing impartiality; no one received a favored position; all were treated alike, even his son, Allen.

By September of 1907 Allen had acquired debts of \$3,109.92. Among them was an obligation of \$387.27 owed to St. John's Military School, Salina, Kansas. Dr. William B. Dewees of Dewees Sanatorium, Salina, on May 15, 1907, presented a bill in the amount of \$250 to cover treatment of the 16-year-old boy for "chronic gonorrheal epididymitis, prostatitis and post-urethritis; chronic gonorrheal cystitis; gonorrheal rheumatism; from Oct. 7, 1906 to January 1907."

Willie, as guardian of Allen, petitioned the Probate Court for permission to sell the family homestead, 715 Quincy Street, Topeka, to pay the debts of his son and authority was

This selection of photos of the Sells and Gray parade wagons appeared in their 1900 route book. Pfening Archives.

granted on September 9, 1907. Willie sold the house and barn for \$6,000. The debts were paid, but the balance of Allen's money, \$2,890.08, disappeared in Willie's pocket.

F.M. Bonebrake, trustee for Allen after the death of Willie, in his statement closing the trust said, "that at the time of the death of said William Sells, he was without means or pro-

Newspaper ad used by the Sells and Gray Circus during the 1901 season. Author's Collection.

THE GREAT SELLS & GRAY'S UNITED SHOWS

WILL EXHIBIT ONE DAY ONLY,
AFTERNOON AND EVENING
AT TOPEKA, THURSDAY, June 13

THE EARL SISTERS

Known throughout all the English speaking world - The Earl Sisters are the most famous of the world. They stand alone, without peer, equal, or rival in the most perfect manner, in the most perfect manner, in the most perfect manner.

BOVALAPUS

Nature's Wonderful Mystery - A Bi-Horned Amphibian. The only one of its kind in America. He like his name here and there.

100 Startling Acts and Features. Arcenic Attractions Unparalleled.

MAGNIFICENT STREET PARADE

at 10 o'clock show day.

THE SIX MARVELOUS EDDYS.

Former acrobats of the world, who receive the largest salary paid to any performers.

LOCATION OF SHOW GROUNDS.
Only Five Minutes Walk
from Transfer Station. Corner Ninth and Jefferson Streets.
Advance Reserved Seat Sale begins 9 a. m. Show Day at Rowley & Sauer Drug Store, Southeast Cor. 8 and Kane Ave.
E. J. SELLS and J. L. GRAY, Props.

erty, and there was no estate out of which to pay the estate of said Allen Sells, the said sum of \$2,890.08." The Title Guaranty and Trust company paid the amount as surety for Willie. (Case 4002, Probate Court, Shawnee County.)

Thanks to Willie's judicious guardianship, Allen received in the final settlement of the trust the magnificent sum of \$228.79 and one piece of rental property.

Willie never saw his grandchild born to Mattie B. Goshorn and the 16-year-old Allen on March 11, 1908. The child died in August and the court ordered Allen to pay expenses of \$498.00.

Willie had failed again.

This was the man H.H. Tammen selected as a business associate. Tammen was no fool. Surely he was aware of Willie's reputation. The only explanation can be that Willie had something Tammen wanted — the Sells name — and Tammen was willing to take a calculated risk to get it, knowing from the beginning that in the end Willie would be eliminated.

The Sells-Floto Shows began a long season on Saturday, April 7, 1906, opening in Wichita Falls, Texas. It was largely a north and south season, up and down, like a yo-yo. South to Galveston, north to Duluth, south to Omaha, west to Cheyenne, south to Pueblo, west to Salt Lake City, north to Pocetello, east to Billings, south to Amarillo, west to Albuquerque, south to Laredo, north to Austin, east to Lafayette, Louisiana, west to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, south to Mexico City, north to Chihuahua, closing the tour on Friday, December 13. It was truly a granger show.

Geographically, the number of dates played in each state breaks down as follows:

Texas	54
Missouri	19
Oklahoma	15
Louisiana	14
Kansas	14
Colorado	14
Iowa	10
Minnesota	10
Montana	9
South Dakota	6
Utah	6
North Dakota	5
New Mexico	5
Nebraska	4
Idaho	2
Wisconsin	1
Wyoming	1

The most unusual feature of the route was the 24 dates played in the Republic of Mexico.

For the 24th date of the season, Thursday, May 3, the show jumped 60 miles on the Frisco from Joplin, Missouri, to Parsons, Kansas. The handouts used by the press department were for the most part the stories used by the Great Floto Shows in 1905 with



The ticket wagon and concessions of the Sells and Downs United Shows are shown in a 1904 photo. Pfening Archives

slight modifications. The *Parsons Daily Sun* in reviewing the show on the 4th was generally favorable. The crowds were reported as large for both performances. The writer for the *Sun* had some interesting comments.

"If there is any kick to be made it is because there were no chariot races. The writer of this article is not an authority on circuses, but he does hold that a show is not a circus without a chariot race.

"Among the attractions there were several that were of extraordinary merit. Chief among these were the Potter family of aerialists, which means in common talk that they are trapeze performers. The A B C family were good in their tight rope stunt, and were just as good when they appeared as the L M N O P family in an acrobatic and tumbling act. The X Y Z troupe presented an act on bicycles that would be hard to beat, and the clowns were the best of their kind."

He continued by citing the high quality of the bareback riders, the trained animals, the excellence of the band and the costumes which were "new and were chosen with so much taste that it looked as though a woman had done it."

"The side show was bum, and the people who took it in would have given five cents to be able to get their dime back."

In his final paragraph the reporter states, "However, there is one thing for which the show should receive praise. There were no runaways on account of the parade or the steam callopie and there were no robberies reported and the grafters were conspicuous in their absence. Considering everything, it was a good attraction."

The *Parsons Sun Semi-Weekly* on May 8 saw things a little differently. "While some people paid fifty cents for tickets of admission others paid sixty, seventy-five and a dollar . . . Reserved seats were sold at from twenty-five to sixty cents. Ten cents was charged for admission to the side show, and after about two or three stunts of about three minutes each were shown, the barkers announced that it would cost twenty-five cents more to see the remainder of the show. However, the remainder was of a nature that only a few people were anxious to dig up their money."

The show left Parsons on the Frisco and arrived in Independence, Friday, May 4, on the Santa Fe, a move of 91 miles. The lot was north of the Santa Fe station and a short haul. The parade was on time.

A large crowd attended the matinee which ended in time for the people to get home before a deluge of rain struck the town. After the rain quit, the show sent the steam callopie into the business district to reaffirm that the evening performance would be given as scheduled. A crowd slightly smaller than that of the afternoon braved the mud for the evening exhibition.

The next day the *Independence Daily Reporter* called it a fine show. "It was just large enough to accommodate an audience of several thousand people and yet small enough that those attending did not have to make themselves cross-eyed in an effort to see a dozen performances at once. It had two rings and an elevated stage. The performances in the two rings were the same. The performers were all a neat, clean, respectable looking lot of people and the performances were of a high order.

"The show was good throughout and on time to a dot. It was well worth the patronage received."

The *Independence Evening Star* reported, "Several novelties were introduced, notably the stunts with trained bulls. These acts are remarkable because the bull is the most stupid and stubborn of beasts.

"The order was of the best and there was no grafting of any kind. The show is owned by the Denver Post and there is plenty of capital behind it."

Saturday, May 5, found the show in Iola, 56 miles from Independence on the Santa Fe.

The *Iola Daily Register* used three of the show's handouts, but one, extolling the virtues of whiskey, seems rather strange for prohibition Kansas. Under the headline of "The Great Animal Trainer," Christopher Seitz [Zeit] of the Sells-Floto shows recounted the use of whiskey in treating sick circus animals. Seitz stated that, "when under the influence of a 'stimulant' a stranger may with perfect safety

enter a lion's cage, for it will show no signs of ferocity unless deliberately annoyed." It is not clear who should receive the "stimulant," the lion or the stranger.

When the big elephant Mamma Mary had influenza, a half barrel of mustard was applied externally and in the course of the day Mamma Mary consumed three gallons of whiskey. "Up to that time there was no case on record of any animal having suffered from influenza."

Willie Sells was no stranger to the editor of the *Register* for a feeling of hostility pervades the review of the parade. "For a great many years William Sells has been connected with a different circus every year. But no matter what circus it was he and the old spotted horse with the blue eyes were a regular part of the parade. Before William got fat and the horse got stiff the two appeared as horseman and mount. Of late years for the convenience of each William has been drawn behind the spotted horse in a vehicle with strong springs." The writer also chided Willie about his announced intention last year to go to Arizona and capture the herd of wild camels roaming the desert.

The crowd of visitors to the city was reported as being smaller than usual. The parade was on time and "reached clear around the square and was long enough to lap half way around again." The band was reported as unusually good and among its members were two "Iola boys," Billy Gay and "Dad" Webster. The horses were described as "a fine lot."

"Everything about the show looks new and clean."

Three special policemen were appointed for the day because, "Advance reports from places where the show has been are that a bunch of crooks including holdups, pickpockets and shell game men are clinging close to them." Prior to Willie Sells no such complaints were ever made in Kansas regarding the Floto shows. There were no arrests.

The *Register* was terse in its review of the performance stating only that, "The Sells-Floto circus was a disappointment to those who attended but there were not as many people attended the circus as is customary and consequently not so many were disappointed."

The next stand was Kansas City, Monday, May 7. On a Sunday move the show jumped 109 miles on the Santa Fe from Iola. The *Kansas City Star* was the only paper to mention the show and its comments were limited to the parade. "There have been longer circus parades in Kansas City, but none that was more complete in each department, from its music, consisting of three bands and a 'hobo orchestra,' to the little herd of big elephants."

"Every costume worn by the riders looked as if it had just come from the maker."

There was real excitement during the parade when the calliope swung around the corner from Eleventh Street into Walnut and ran down the little red wagon drawn by a "sacred cow." The East Indian driver jumped and landed in a ditch where men were laying pipe and the "sacred cow" sprang up on the sidewalk. The little red wagon was smashed to bits and left in the street. No one was injured.

From Kansas City the show moved 40 miles on the Santa Fe to Lawrence for the next exhibition, Tuesday, May 8. The Lawrence newspaper gave the show a good reception although the coverage was not as comprehensive as it could easily have been.

The *Daily World*, for instance, reported the trains arriving at 8:30 but gave no reason for the lateness. The show grounds at the south end of Massachusetts Street was described as a busy place even before the circus wagons began arriving. Delivery wagons with provisions for the show people and hay and feed for the horses were on the grounds long before the show.

In an odd sentence the *World* stated that, "As usual the parade was two hours late, but was unexceptionally good when it came." The *World* was impressed with the quality of the menagerie which it considered "quite complete for a 25-cent show."

"The elephants were particularly well trained. The troupe of lions, leopards and miscellaneous big cats used as a headliner for the concert were unusually well groomed animals just out of winter quarters."

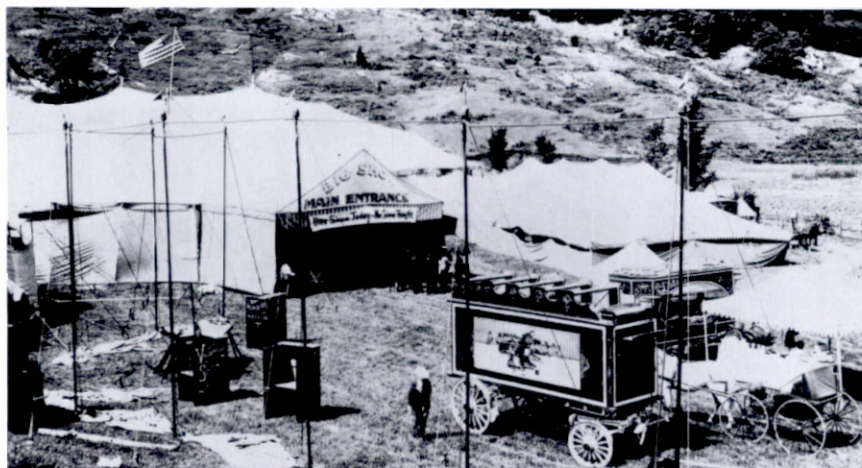
One is grateful to the *Daily World* for its report of the late arrival, the 25-cent admission and the lions as the concert feature, but at the same time one is annoyed by the errors perpetrated, especially in a story carried the day after the show.

"The Sells-Floto show, which carried the name of Floto merely for adornment, entertained two big crowds here yesterday and surprised everybody with the general high grade of the show."

"Wm. Sells bought this show in Denver last summer, Otto Floto having broken up in the business. He bought a menagerie somewhere else and got a lot of new canvas to cover it all. The performers are new every season, so the show has mighty little of the old Floto show about it."

The day before, show day, the *World* reported that Willie was a "foster son of old Peter Sells, of Sells Bros."

The *Lawrence Daily Gazette* did not deal with the show as extensively as did the *World* but what it had to say is worth quoting: "The Sells-Floto street parade did not occur until 1 o'clock this afternoon, on account of



The midway of the Sells and Downs Circus in Billings, Montana in 1903. Pfening Archives.

the late arrival of the circus in town, but it was a dandy when it did take place. The wagons were all freshly painted, the costumes all new, the horses all fat and sleek, the women were not jaded nor tired looking, and everything indicated prosperity."

The parade in Lawrence did not pass without incident. Arthur Boyles, a teamster with the show, attempted to climb aboard a moving wagon and a wheel crushed his foot. Boyle was sent to Topeka on the "plug" to spend several days in a hospital.

Weather for the date was not the best. High temperature was 68 with a low of 49, which, the *Daily Journal* believed, kept a good crowd from being larger.

Throughout the Kansas tour Willie was constantly referred to as the owner of Sells-Floto, or, at the minimum, a partner, and Willie made no attempt to explain the arrangement.

Did Willie really buy the William P. Hall shows in 1905? If he did, what became of it? Was it merged with the Floto show? The author has found no confirmation for the purchase, and doubts that it ever occurred, for Willie's entire life shows a multiplicity of grandiose schemes and statements totally lacking in fact. Unless one were drenched to the skin, it would be a mistake to take Willie's word that it was raining. Possibly Willie had a few shares in Sells-Floto.

The only clue to Willie's contract with the American Amusement Company, doing business as Sells-Floto, is a story in the *Topeka State Journal*, July 30, 1907, reporting the attachment of the ticket wagon and the money found therein at three o'clock on Monday, July 29, during the Wichita stand of 1907. A petition filed by Willie's attorneys, Dale and Amidon, in the District Court of Sedgwick County, Kansas, alleged that Willie was

engaged to work with the show and allow his name to be used in connection with the show, for the sum of \$100 a week and expenses. Willie claimed that there was still due him for wages on the 1906 contract the sum of \$1,495. Unfortunately, repeated searches of the files of the district court have failed to locate the case. Regardless of Willie's position, when Sells-Floto played Topeka, Wednesday, May 9, Willie received a hero's welcome.

The advance car arrived in Topeka in the third week of April and the town was thoroughly billed. On their heels came the advertising car of the Great Wallace shows announcing their coming on Memorial Day, May 30. Sells-Floto advertising car No. 3 under the direction of Fred McMann, a Topekan who had worked on several of Willie's shows, rebilled the town on April 30. May 4 found another Wallace crew hard at work. Wallace hit Topeka again on May 8. On the 10th the *Topeka Daily Capital* reported, "It is difficult to see the walls of the buildings on Kansas Avenue north of Fourth street on account of the prodigal manner in which that part of town was covered with posters and 'paper' for the Sells-Floto and Wallace shows." Ben Wallace might as well have spared himself the extra expense for nothing could detract from the "home town" response to Willie's show.

James McElroy, the 24 hour man for Sells-Floto, arrived in Topeka on the 8th to look over the lot and check out the contracts with suppliers. McElroy was another Topekan man who had been a long-time employee of Willie's various shows. He had once been an accomplished equestrian, but an accident on one of Willie's shows had caused his right arm to be amputated at the shoulder. Willie, to his credit, thereafter always provided him with a suitable job.

It was an easy move of 26 miles on the Santa Fe from Lawrence and the show arrived at four a.m. Willie persuaded the city council to forego the

\$200 license fee by promising the Sells-Floto would establish winter quarters in Topeka. The tents went up on the fair grounds.

Despite the cold weather thousands of people jammed the Kansas Avenue to see the parade. Some low lying parts of the city had suffered a light frost early in the morning of show day and coats were much in evidence along the route. The parade moved north on Topeka Avenue to Second Street and then east to Kansas Avenue and over the bridge to North Topeka giving that part of the city its first circus parade in many years. At the end of the North Topeka business district the parade turned around, crossed the river again, and proceeded south on Kansas Avenue to Seventeenth Street and then west to the fair grounds at Seventeenth and Topeka.

The parade pleased everyone with its clean, sparkling, new look and the excellent music. The *Topeka State Journal* closed its review of the parade with the following: "One of the features of the street parade was the 'tail end'—the ever present calliope. This was no ordinary calliope—it was actually in tune and the operator knew how to play it. Also—Willie Sells, semi-proprietor of the show, held the seat and drove the six fine horses which pulled the musical apparatus. 'Billie' was rather busy with his team, which did not seem to be seasoned to the peculiar brand of music which rose from the rear, but he found time, between setting the brake to avoid a slump into some unexplored abyss in the Kansas Avenue pavement, and guiding his heavy weights, to wave his hat at acquaintances along the way. By Billie's side sat Otto Floto watching how it was done."

This day was the pinnacle of Willie's career.

After the parade Willie appeared in court for his trial in the Stephenson affair. The charge was reduced from assault with intent to kill to assault and battery, and Willie pleaded guilty. Sentence was suspended, and no record can be found to indicate that a sentence of any extent was ever delivered.

The case of Joseph Bailey vs. Sells had also been set for May 9, but a trial presently before the court ran longer than expected and Bailey's case was never called.

Five young black men from Sells-Floto appeared at the Court House and requested attachment of the show in an attempt to collect back pay, the combined total being \$40. They were unable to post a surety bond and not being residents of Kansas were ineligible for a poverty affidavit. Nothing could be done for them.

While the show was in Topeka the police arrested an employee, Edward McCullough, and returned him to Kansas City to answer a charge of

stealing several gold watches valued at \$210.

The *Topeka State Journal* in its review of the show published the day after the performance reported it as "a very decent show," but lamented the absence of a printed program making it impossible for the reviewer to name names. The reporter liked the bicycle riding family (Martells) in spite of their act being "old and moth-eaten." He liked the "reubs" who presented the trained cattle; the tall acrobats who kicked the ceiling; "that old guy with the Scotch brogue;" the elephants; the calliope; and the absence of alleged races around the hippodrome. He did recognize "The Girl in Red" as Kitty Krueger (or Kruger), a Topeka woman, who had been a featured bareback rider with Sells & Downs.

A Kansas Institution, Bigger and Better Than Ever.

THE GREAT Sells & Downs United Shows

WILL OPEN THE SEASON AT
Topeka, Saturday Afternoon, April 25.

Sponsored by Organization. Significant in Presentation.
The World's Best Talent. America's Greatest Performers.
The Garcinetti Family of Famous Acrobats.
First Appearance in America.
Celebrated Martell Family of Bicycle Riders.

Orin Davenport,
William Marks and Wm. Rolland the World's Best Riders.
DELAVOYE and FRIS, the FUNNY CLOWNS, and 20 OTHERS.
A Complete Menagerie and New Showing Arrangements.
GREATEST HORSES OF ANY SHOW ON EARTH.
A Genuine Zoological Rarety. The Sacred White Carabao.
from the Philippine Islands. The only one in the country.
PAVE STREET PARADE at a special meeting of exhibition. (Show held at 1 and 2 p.m. Performance at 4 and 8 p.m.)
Prof. Carl Hall's Military Band will give a free concert one hour before each performance. Afternoon and Night Shows at 4 and 8.

TOPEKA, SATURDAY, APRIL 25th.

Excursion Rates on All Railroads. Location of Show Grounds: Doughitt Tract.
Advance Reserved Seat (beginning at 10c. Show Day at Sells & Downs's Drug Store.)
E. J. SELLS and M. J. DOWNS, Proprietors.

Newspaper ad used by the Sells and Downs Circus during the 1903 season. Author's Collection.

The *Topeka Daily Herald* commented, "The show will probably grow to its price of fifty cents in time, but it is not now comparable with the best of the fifty cent circuses. It boasts two particularly good acts. The Martell family of bicyclists and a group of aerial artists."

Topekan Charley Eagle's bulldog was the star of the evening performance. A group of clowns were chasing each other around the track and when they passed the reserved seat section Eagle's dog jumped in and grabbed the leading clown by the seat of the pants. The crowd loved it, but the clowns had other thoughts.

"The 'kid show' was all that could be expected and worth a big quarter of anybody's money," reported the *Plain Dealer*, Topeka's leading black newspaper. "In this department our old friend and fellow-townsmen, Tommy Lewis, had charge of the band and the minstrel performances. Lewis is one of the best musicians on the road and is supported by a fine lot of ladies and gentlemen, among whom is Miss Essie Williams, whose face is very familiar to the show-going public of Topeka."

The *Plain Dealer* also reported that "Sage" Northington left the show in Topeka saying that he was done with the road and was going to settle down and purchase a home.

Attendance was good at both performances, but here is no mention of jam-packed tents or people on the straw. It was a good circus day. Willie had been in the spotlight all day. Everything had gone well for him. His day in court exceeded his expectations. The crowds had cheered him as the calliope passed in the parade. There was no rain. His photograph appeared two columns wide in the *Topeka Daily Capital*. It was the last time Willie ever played Topeka. It was a good circus day. Willie would never see its equal.

Junction City is 72 miles west of Topeka on the Union Pacific, and the show made the jump in good time for the exhibition on Thursday, May 10. A second advance car visited the city on May 3 and posted their bills on utility poles along the main streets in violation of city ordinance. Merchants immediately complained to the city council and the show was forced to remove them.

The review of the parade carried on show day by the *Junction City Daily Union* was identical to that published by the *Topeka State Journal* the day before, omitting only the part about Willie waving his hat to his friends.

The *Union* in reviewing the performance commented, "The trapeze act that closed the performance was one of the big features. It was performed by a woman and four men, two of whom were made up as women. For this act it is said that they receive a thousand dollars a week. Another of the first-class features which the show had to offer was the performing elephant act."

Seven laboring men quit the show and were paid off at the ticket wagon without being hassled. The police reported that it was possibly the most orderly show day ever seen in Junction City. Not one arrest was made.

The *Salina Evening Journal* reported the arrival of the train in one section of 33 cars at 4:55 a.m., Friday, May 11, after a jump of 47 miles on the Union Pacific.

Waiting at the depot was Allen Sells, the 15-year-old son of Willie, who was a student at St. John's Military School in Salina. Allen, his father, and Otto Floto accompanied by a friend of Otto's, K. Kruger of Denver, as the *Evening Journal* put it, had breakfast together at the National Hotel. This is the first mention in the Kansas press of any relationship between Kitty Kruger and Otto Floto.

The children attending the public schools were dismissed for the day at the morning recess time. It was also a holiday for the schoolmates of Allen

who were all given passes for the performance.

The faculty of St. John's received special passes. According to the *Salina Daily Union*, "Not only were they admitted to the big show at any time of the day or night and reserved seats at that, but they could take in the side shows and everything else on the grounds. Further than that, their passes entitled them to all the red lemonade they could drink or peanuts they could eat, in fact, they could take their meals with the circus people if they so desired.

"They were admitted to any part of the tent, to the men's dressing rooms, make up rooms, etc.

"The passes were issued by Mr. Sells himself and wound up with these words: 'In short you can do anything you want with the Sells-Floto shows during their stay here.'"

One wonders if Allen gained anything from Willie's grandiose gesture.

The show unloaded at Ninth Street near the Union Pacific depot and the haul to the lot just north of the station was not more than two blocks. The city license was \$50.

"During the street parade this morning two of the camels became unmanageable at the corner of Seventh and Walnut Streets and ran away. A man was riding on one of the animals, and being unable to stick to his job, rolled off, falling on the ground on his back," reported the *Evening Journal*. "He held to the lines and was dragged for quite a distance over the rough street, but was uninjured. As soon as he released his hold on the lines the camels stopped."

Both papers called the show one of the best to ever appear in Salina. The horses, especially, were praised for their beauty and their excellent condition.

The next move, from Salina to Marysville, Saturday, May 12, was unusually long, 199 miles on the Union Pacific. The Union Pacific is the only railroad serving Marysville but to get there from Salina it is necessary to pass through Topeka, a backtracking of nearly 120 miles.

The Marysville date was rather humdrum. The total review of the *Advocate-Democrat* was, "The Sells-Floto parade is the grandest display of splendor that has ever been seen here with a show of its size." The comment was generous for a paper that carried no show advertising.

The *Marshall County News* ran ads for three days, April 27, May 4 and May 11. Five of the show's handouts were published. Show day was reported in one paragraph. "The Sells-Floto show drew a fair crowd in the afternoon but at night the attendance was very light. The show is not the biggest on earth and does not pretend to be but they have a number of first



Two cages are shown in the Denver, Colorado winter quarters of the Sells-Floto Circus around 1906. Pfening Archives.

class acts. The parade was the best ever put up by a show in Marysville."

Mrs. Homer Phillipi and Mrs. Fred Brooks received more coverage than the show did from both papers combined. While driving on the lot the sidewall billowed out and caused their horse to run away. Mrs. Brooks sustained a fracture of the collar bone and Mrs. Phillipi was "severely strained about the hips." For the miles travelled the horse was many times more dangerous than the automobile.

A rumor ran rampant around Marysville. A preacher, Rev. Curren, was called to the lot to visit some show people of his denomination. Since the "Girl in Red" and Otto Floto had been seen several times together on the streets of Marysville the townspeople concluded that there had been a wedding on the show grounds. It was not true, but the romance of Kitty Kruger and Otto Floto was evident to all.

Kitty Kruger was the show's featured bareback rider, appearing as the "Girl in Red." Kruger had worked for Willie in 1904 on the Sells & Downs show and in 1905 had been on the Great William P. Hall Shows. The Topeka papers frequently referred to her as a home town girl, but little is known about her locally and she does not appear in any city directories. Kruger may have been her professional name only. The author once read a newspaper report that she was the wife of a man named Johnson who was on the staff of one of the larger shows. Floto was married, September 15, 1906, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Katherine, daughter of John Rutter of Kansas City, Missouri.

There is one thing for certain, the show's handout concerning the "Girl

in Red" was pure fantasy. Pierre Roquet, according to the story, a breeder of fine horses, moved his wife and two sons from France to Colorado in 1886. They were well-to-do immigrants and continued to prosper in their new home.

"Shortly after their arrival a baby girl appeared on the scene, and joy was supreme, for now the big brothers had a little wee sister. Marie Roquet grew to womanhood in the free air of Colorado, and under her brothers' tutelage became the foremost horsewoman in the entire west."

Pierre placed his daughter in a convent in France, but "after her free life in the wild western home, she not only rebelled, but for ten years was an unknown quantity in the family history while keeping her mother and brothers informed as to her welfare.

"One night, after a performance at the Circus Carre, Amsterdam, of 'The Girl in Red,' a gray-haired old Frenchman pushed his way through the throngs to the dressing tent, and while the applause of the multitude resounded in his ears, he embraced the most famous circus rider of the day, exclaiming 'My little Marie.' Now known through the old world as 'Mam'selle Rouge,' this same little Colorado girl had become celebrated as the champion premiere equestrienne of the circus world."

Several other featured performers had worked for Willie in the past. The Ty-Bell Troupe, trapeze, was on Sells & Gray in 1901; the Martell Family, bicycles, on Sells & Downs in 1904-5; Blanche Hilliard, bareback, on Sells & Downs in 1904; William Marks, riding clown, on Sells Colossal London Olympian, 1891.

The show left Marysville on the Union Pacific on Sunday for a run of 113 miles to St. Joseph, Missouri, to exhibit Monday, May 14. Three months

The big thriller of the day occurred during the parade. David Whipple, a teamster, arrived with a load of bricks at the site at Ninth and Maple where the new Masonic temple was under construction just as the parade was passing south on Maple. An attache of

Willie's Uncles are Mad!
BECAUSE HIS NAME IS
SELTZ!

"A HIT BIRD ALWAYS FLITTERS"

at is a test everyone knows. We have been hurting Belle Bro.'s business all along the line; they feel it fairly, and hence are trying to down us by reporting malicious slanders broadcast. They will tell your hotel keepers that we are thieves. They will tell your storekeepers that we cannot pay our bills. They will even go so far as to tell your citizens that we have no homes to be seen with. Why? Simply because we are conducting a FIRST CLASS CIRCUS, under the firm name of

SELLS & RENTFROW.

The show returned to Kansas on a

Once again, as they had in the season of 1903, Fred Jewell and the Sells-

Floto band gave up their day of rest to put a few extra dollars in their pockets. The band gave two concerts, at 3 and 7:30 p.m., at Wichita's amusement park, Wonderful Wonderland Park, "admission to park, a dime."

Show day was Labor Day and thousands saw the parade and attended the show at Mathewson's pasture at Second and Mead Streets. The line of march was up Second Street to Main, down Main to Douglas Avenue and east to the show grounds. Despite the unfulfilled threat of rain, the show drew two good houses.

For the final stand in Kansas, Tuesday, September 4, the show moved 59 miles on the Santa Fe to Anthony. The *Anthony Bulletin*, a weekly, reported on September 7, that, "The usual hangers-on and grafters that usually prey upon a circus crowd were not in evidence and all the officers of the circus were gentlemen. Only one case of short changing was reported and that was made good by a nigger attache mighty quickly when the police were notified."

The *Anthony Republican* gave the show a review that could have described almost any date in Kansas. "Good crowds attended both performances of the Sells-Floto shows here Tuesday. The uniform report of those attending shows a well pleased crowd. The animals were fine and healthy, well cared for specimens, all properly tagged. The only fake permitted was a hoochy-coochy dance and an alleged wild man, both in the side shows. The show carries a bright and clever lot of people and give a bright and entertaining performance. The music was unusually good. Their clowns were numerous and clever. Their tight wire, tumbling and aerial acts were as fine as ever shown here. One of the clowns did a clever ladder balancing act that deserves featuring. There were no card or shell games nor short change artists in the outfit. It is a clean, strong show, that we'd like to see again."

From Kansas the show moved into Oklahoma, followed by dates in Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana and closing in the Republic of Mexico. Business was good. A card from Willie early in November stated, "This circus is making everybody with it rich."

The show went into winter quarters near Los Angeles. What happened between Willie and Tammen may never be known. There are rumors that Willie was fired for abandoning some troupers in Mexico. There are other rumors that gambling was the cause, although, with the exception of the Parsons date, there is no mention from any of the Kansas towns concerning graft which had always been the most important aspect of all of Willie's shows.

Sells-Floto ran and advertisement in



The Sells-Floto Circus used this famous lithograph in 1909 showing the original Sells Brothers, as well as Willie and Otto Floto. Willie had died the year before, and had not been associated with the circus since 1906. The Ringlings, who owned the Sells title, cut short the unauthorized use of Sells Brothers, and the poster was not used after 1909. Pfening Archives.

Billboard, January 26, 1907, seeking performers, side show personnel and musicians. Interested people were instructed to write to William Sells in Los Angeles. On February 2, *Billboard* ran an ad requesting those who wrote to Los Angeles to write again to Denver, with no mention of Willie.

The most important factor in Willie's dismissal was the fact that Tammen had acquired from Willie the name of Sells and there was no longer any need to employ a manager that required constant surveillance. As a sharp dealer Willie was extremely crude compared to the finesse of H.H. Tammen.

Willie was back in Topeka by the middle of April and apparently at loose ends. Nothing issued from him until early June when the premature announcement was made that Willie had purchased Lemen Brothers show and would make an extensive tour of Latin America.

"Punch" Wheeler, press agent, had opened the season with Sells-Floto, but early in July he joined Willie's Great Sells shows. Also on the new show were former Tammen employees C.B. Fredericks as general manager; James McElroy as assistant manager; and Charles Coleman as advertising manager. Were they, too, sacked by Tammen, or did they listen to Willie's siren song? The show was announced as opening in Topeka July 4, but the date was never played. Despite a "Wanted Now" ad in *Billboard*, August 31, the show never got off the ground. Willie died February 17, 1908, in New York City.

Willie Sells at the start of his career

had everything going for him. He grew up on the Sells Brothers shows. He was an outstanding bareback rider. He had experience in every aspect of the circus business. He could move it from here to there, put it up and take it down. He produced performances that pleased the public. His family was wealthy and willing to back him. His father, Allen, was one of the most respected persons in the circus world and could open many doors for Willie. Willie should have become one of the all-time greats in circus history.

He blew it all.

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OSCAR STONE, CIRCUS RIDER

by Stuart Thayer

A version of this paper was presented at the 1983 convention of the Circus Historical Society in Akron, Ohio, on September 4, 1983.

We are not often privy to the details of the lives of early American circus performers. Unless they achieved unusual renown there was little contemporary interest in their career. In fact, there was little interest in the circus itself until the time of the Civil War. Circus owners are fairly well documented and so are famous performers, men such as Levi J. North and Richard Sands. However, the middle-level performers, as a group, are probably less well-known to us than are the elephants of the day. This lack of information cannot be blamed on either the times or the profession of circus performer; it exists even today when only the biggest names in any field stay in the public memory. Few persons could tell us the name of the second baseman of the Detroit Tigers in the 1960's, without first researching the question.

Because of this situation, when we do find details of such a person's career, we treat it with a respect out of proportion to his importance. In this paper we will do that for Oscar R. Stone.

He was born on December 3, 1815, on a farm near Pittstown, New York. At the age of twelve he was apprenticed to a tailor. Anyone who has read Charles Dickens is familiar with the lot of apprentices in the early nineteenth century. It was a continual round of duty, encompassing not only the master's trade, but the menial tasks involving the household. After a short time, Stone grew weary of tending livestock, churning butter and similar tasks so he left his first position.

He apprenticed himself to another tailor in Bennington, Vermont and then to a third in Troy until he had mastered enough of his trade to set himself up as a tailor in Hoosick Falls, New York. He was about nineteen years old at this time.

At some point in his life, Stone had seen a circus — we wish we knew which one — and claimed later to have been so impressed with the riders that he determined to become one himself. Knowing no one in the business, he set out to learn on his own.

It was not uncommon for boys to come home from the circus and try to emulate the routines they had seen there. The backyard circus was part

of our culture until quite recently. However, many of the men who went on to make a career of the arena ran away from home as boys. We can point to Richard Sands, Dan Minnich, John Robinson and Eaton Stone as examples of this. Of course, the majority of performers began by being accepted as apprentices. We find newspaper ads in the nineteenth century asking for boys interested in becoming performers. However, here we have Oscar Stone, who proceeded to teach himself the art of circus riding.

He first purchased a horse, an almost unmanageable mare named Kitty Clover. She cost him twenty dollars and a gold watch. Somehow, he was able to handle her, as she was on his show as late as 1838. Then he found a coal pit in the woods about two miles out of Hoosick Falls. This had been dug by blacksmiths in the rough shape of a circus ring. By the use of stakes and boards Stone converted it into his practice arena. Every day after work he would take the mare to the coal pit and ride her round and round as they both learned the business. Interestingly, Stone did not use a pad or a saddle, but applied himself from the start to become a bareback rider. At this time, about 1835, there were only four or five bareback riders in America, so he had his heart set on joining a rather exclusive group.

Practicing in a coal pit did have some disadvantages. Stone is quoted as saying, "After some hours of practice on a hot summer's evening I would return home utterly begrimed — the devil himself could not have distinguished me from one of his imps."

With the approach of winter, some substitute had to be found for the coal bottom. Stone located a piece of ground in the village and spent \$100 to erect a ring barn with a thatched roof. By this time he had accumulated enough money to purchase two more horses. With a couple of local boys he spent leisure evenings practicing horsemanship.

By early spring, 1836, Stone had five horses and had trained four boy riders and decided it was time to abandon the tailor's trade for that of circus proprietor. He began by performing for pay in a four-day stand at his own arena. After that, he went to Read's Hollow, west of Hoosick Falls, and enclosed an abandoned blacksmith shop with a board fence for use as an arena. It was still winter and the snow had to be shoveled away before performances could begin. Town elec-



OSCAR R. STONE.

Stone rode his horse, Kitty, and others learned of the circus, and an apprentice to him.

Oscar Stone. Drawing from *The Atlas* (New York) March 10, 1844. Illustration courtesy of Arthur Saxon.

tions were being held at Read's Hollow during Stone's stay there and this made for good business. Circuses in those days were always anxious to perform in a place where some public event was in progress. Election day, court settings, militia musters and school commencements were all considered good times at which to play a town.

Stone next visited North Adams, Massachusetts where he had five days of "good business," according to one source. From there he travelled to Albany. At the corner of Green and Division Streets he set up his show, presumably erecting an arena. He acquired two more horses and several men at this point, and began a six-week stand.

Among Stone's performers in Albany was Mons. Gouff, the man-monkey, an Englishman whose real name was Goff. His specialty was donning a monkey suit and performing various stunts in the ring, including riding a horse. He made his American debut in Boston in 1831; we find him on English bills as early as 1825.

At the conclusion of the Albany stand Stone purchased a tent and



Oscar Stone was a master of scenic riding. The Indian Hunter, shown here in a poster from the 1840s or 1850s, was the

wagons and was ready to tour as a full-fledged, albeit very small, traveling show. At the time a small menagerie and wax-figure exhibition with the title Hoadley, Latham & Eldred was in the Albany area and Stone agreed to throw in with them.

We don't know who Hoadley was, but Latham had been in the menagerie business in the Albany area for some years. At one time, according to George Stone, Latham's show had been destroyed by indignant citizens of Waterloo, New York, when it was discovered that his "whale" was made of shoe leather. This incident dates from about 1829, seven years before he met Stone.

The Eldred in the title was Gilbert N. Eldred, future partner of the great John Robinson. He had been employed until this year by his brother Edward Eldred. With the closing of the firm of Crane & Eldred at the end of the 1835 season, Gilbert was free to join Hoadley and Latham.

Stone was apparently not a partner in the firm, as his name was not in the title, nor for that matter, in the few newspaper ads we've found. The partners seemed more intent upon advertising their snake collection — boa constrictors and the like — than their self-taught bareback rider.

The show fell in behind J.W. Bancker's American Arena Co. when it reached western New York State. There are several references in the literature to Bancker being driven off his route by the Zoological Institute in 1836. We have not been able to verify this, but we have found Bancker and June, Titus, Angevine & Co. in the Buffalo area at the same time. Bancker was one of the stockholders in the Institute, so we don't understand why

most popular of these acts. Photo of original bill in Hertzberg Circus Collection, San Antonio, by John Polacsek.

he should have been so treated. He does disappear at this time and we don't even find his name again for six years.

We offer this aside because Stone apparently followed Bancker's billing into Ontario. The story is that the local citizenry, seeing the advance notices of a large circus, were greeted on show day by Hoadley, Latham & Eldred's little caravan, a situation they seemed to take in good humor.

What route we have found has them in Buffalo on July 4, Detroit on August 5 and Chicago on September 14. They had the honor of being the first circus to play Chicago. The lot was on Lake Street and admission was twenty-five cents. One source said they gave the performance in a canvas side-wall and this may be what was referred to as a tent at the time of the purchase in Albany. The word "tent" was not in common use in the circus business before 1850; "canvas" was the term in this instance and most advertising of the day referred to a tent as a "pavilion." They stayed in Chicago several weeks; we know only that they left by November 1 as on that date the second circus to play the town, J.J. Hall's Boston Arena Co., arrived and set up shop.

Hoadley, Latham, Eldred & Co. eventually reached Indianapolis and there their treasurer "sloped with the funds," in the phrase of the time. This put an end to the season.

There are two petitions in the records for performances in Chicago by Hoadley, Latham & Eldred in 1837, but nothing to indicate that Stone was still with them. Admittedly, he is found nowhere else that year.

In December, 1837, he formed a partnership with a Vermonter named John

Benchley which they called the Lafayette Circus. They began performing in Commerce, Missouri on December 5, and spent the next year in Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee and Mississippi. This company was a bit more grand than Hoadley, Latham & Eldred. There were at least nine performers, none of the first rank. They ranged from Benchley's three-year-old son, who did a contortionist act, to Peter Coty, an aged veteran of the ring who had first appeared in this country with Pipin & Breschard in 1814.

A diary kept by a musician with the Lafayette Circus tells of western tramping in those days. It is full of references to country stands, bad roads and having to build bridges. On one move, accomplished over two days, the personnel had to walk twenty-eight of the thirty miles between stands in order to lighten the wagons. There were blow-downs and fights and even one whole day without food.

The type of apprenticeship Stone was serving as a show-owner probably stood him in good stead in later years, but tramping in "new country" was certainly no one's preference. They

Newspaper ad for one of the two Rockwell and Stone units from the Washington D.C. Union of September 6, 1845. Pfening Archives.

POSITIVELY FOR THREE DAYS ONLY.

ROCKWELL & STONE'S
MAMMOTH CIRCUS.



This is generally acknowledged to be by far the most powerful company in the world, being composed of over ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY MEN AND HORSES.

This majestic establishment is to display its vast capabilities to the inhabitants of Washington city and vicinity, on the evenings of THURSDAY, FRIDAY, and SATURDAY, September 11th, 12th, and 13th, 1845, under their enormous Pavilion, to be erected near the market-house.

The renown and fortune won by the managers of this company in Boston, during their long stay in the metropolis of New England, have induced a belief that they are not unknown to the citizens of this place, and they therefore limit their remarks to a narrow space.

THE HOLYDAY SPORTS OF OLD SPAIN!

visited Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana in 1839. Stone left the company in that year and Benchley took the show into Mexico. He may well have been the first American showman to go there.

By 1841 Stone was a more-than-competent rider, having mastered both principal and scenic riding and performing them on barebacked horses. Scenic riding was popular from about 1830 until the Civil War. It was pantomime on horseback, the rider appearing in costume and acting out a vignette such as a sea voyage or a battle scene. Oscar Stone specialized in the most common of these acts, that of the "Indian Hunter" or some similar name. In Indian dress he would mime a redskin going through the parts of a hunt, dancing, stalking, killing and returning in triumph.

In 1841 Stone joined P.H. Nichol's Grecian Arena and Classic Circus, his first affiliation with an eastern troupe. In 1842 he became a partner of Henry Rockwell, one of the better riders of the day, in Rockwell & Stone's New York Circus. With this partnership Stone may be said to have joined the front rank of American showmen. They had a full complement of performers, a fourteen-piece band, a bandwagon, a seventy-five foot round top; in short, a complete show, capable of competing with any of its day. They had several successful seasons, played winter dates in New York and Boston, and by 1845 were large enough to put out two units. Oscar Stone managed one of these, Henry Rockwell the other. This system was used again in 1846.

On May 23, 1846, Oscar Stone's unit played two performances in Raynham, Massachusetts. They had intended to play Taunton, according to a man who saw the show, but were denied a license. A very heavy thunderstorm struck after the evening performance, and Stone and two of his workmen caught bad colds in the process of taking the show down. Apparently, they developed pneumonia. The two canvasmen died shortly after in Taunton; Stone lingered three months, dying in Boston in August.

John Glenroy tells us that upon hearing of Stone's death, Welch & Mann's troupe draped their tent with crepe and the members of the company wore crepe on their left arms for a week.

Having begun his career by riding in a coal pit, Oscar Stone had risen to ownership of one of the more successful circus companies of his day. In 1844 Rockwell & Stone distributed an advertising booklet, from which we have taken some of the details we have reported here. We will close this short description of his life by quoting from it.

We have taken up Oscar R.

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NEW-YORK CIRCUS,
OR
AMERICAN OLYMPIAD

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NEW-YORK:
PRINTED BY JONAS BOSTON, 147 FULTON STREET.

In 1843 Rockwell and Stone commissioned this sixteen page advertising booklet. Typical of the period, it includes many illustrations of riding acts inside. Pfening Archives.

Stone, a youth, dependent upon his exertions, possessed of a

maddening ambition to acquire one certain position. Unaided he has attained it; and now he, with a modest gaze, looks nightly over the strained visages of the admiring and astonished crowds. We leave him, the husband, the father, the friend, the man, who has taught a lesson which should give recurrence to the motto "never despair."

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THE PLACE:

The sale will be held at the renovated salesrooms of Phillips at 406 East 79th Street (between York and 1st Avenues) in New York City, on Sunday, May 6, 1984, at 1 p.m. The posters will be on view there from Thursday to Saturday, May 3 to May 5.

THE CATALOGUE:

This catalogue, like previous ones for Phillips' all-poster auctions, is written by the recognized authority in the field, Jack Rennert. Mr. Rennert is the author of many works on poster art, including *100 Years of Circus Posters* and *100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West*. It measures 9 by 12 inches, contains 80 pages, and reproduces all 287 posters in black and white, as well as 24 in full color. There are fully-annotated descriptions of each poster, in addition to a bibliography and index. Like the previous catalogues, it is sure to be an invaluable reference work and become an out-of-print collector's item.

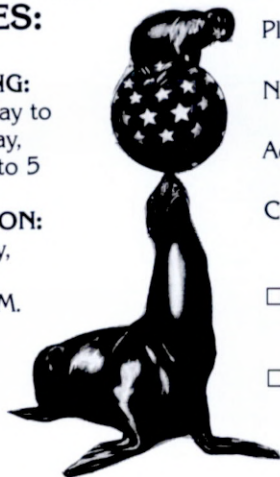
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Elephants and the Wirth Bros. Circus Train



Founded by John, Harry, Philip, and George Wirth, the circus bearing their name gave its first performance in Sydney, Australia on January 1, 1880. The show's first year on rails was 1888. In 1890 the Wirth Bros. Circus utilized three rings and a hippodrome track, allegedly styling their layout after Barnum & Bailey's which they had observed in the United States. Three years later the Wirth Circus embarked on an eight year world tour, ultimately taking in Africa, South America, England, part of Europe, and India, before returning to Australia in 1900.

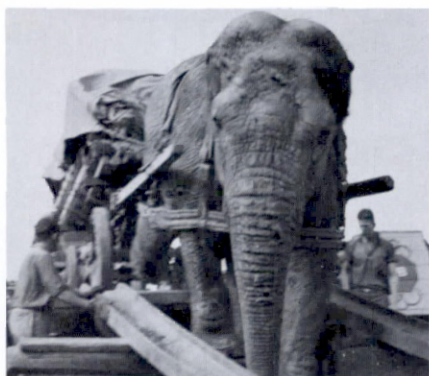
"All of our loading and unloading is done

by our own men with the elephants" wrote Philip Wirth in his autobiographical manuscript, *The Life of Philip Wirth*. These 1916 photographs, reproduced from the May Wirth scrapbooks at the Circus World Museum, illustrate the unique transportation system employed by the Wirth show. Notice how the elephants worked on the deck of the flatcars unlike the "pull-over" teams of horses, such as W. C. Coup is credited with innovating in 1872, which worked beside the railroad cars. The elephants also provided the motive power at the runs, and pulled the circus equipment to and from the lot.

Each of the open air elephant cars appear to have contained from four to six bulls. Access for loading and unloading the elephants was located on the sides of each car at the extreme ends. The elephant car at the right appears to be slightly higher than the other three, probably because it carried the larger elephants.

After Philip Wirth's retirement in 1935, his seven children carried forth until the Wirth Bros. Circus met its demise in 1963. It is not known for how many years elephants were used to move Australia's best known circus. Greg Parkinson





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It must have been a glorious day in Haileybury, Ontario when Canada's own Martin Downs brought his Cole Bros. Circus to town on June 22, 1908. Leading the parade is the Lion bandwagon which was built for Sells and Downs about 1903, and sold to the Kit Carson Wild West in 1910. Pulled by a matched ten horse hitch, the wagon made an impressive sight. Pfening Archives.